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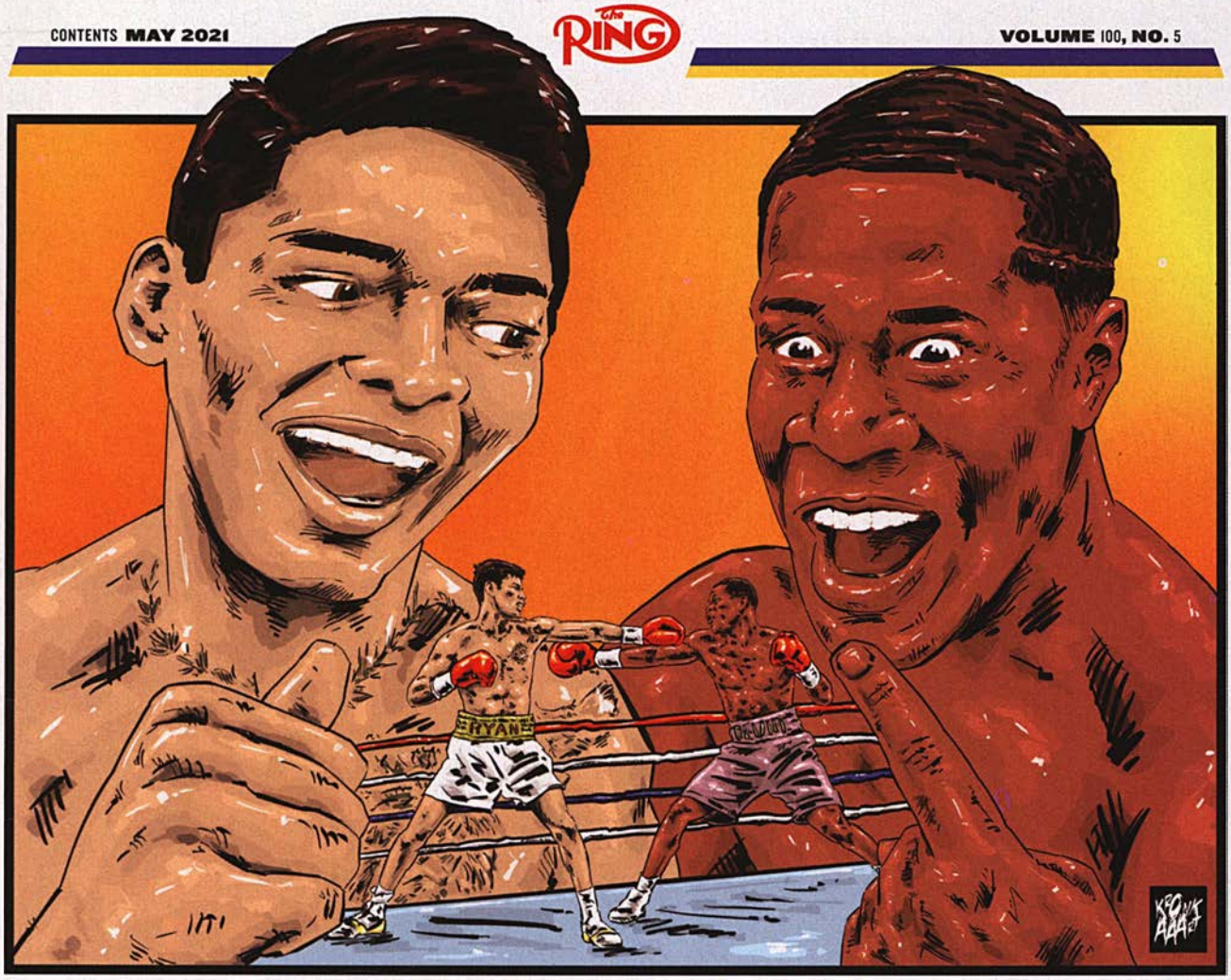

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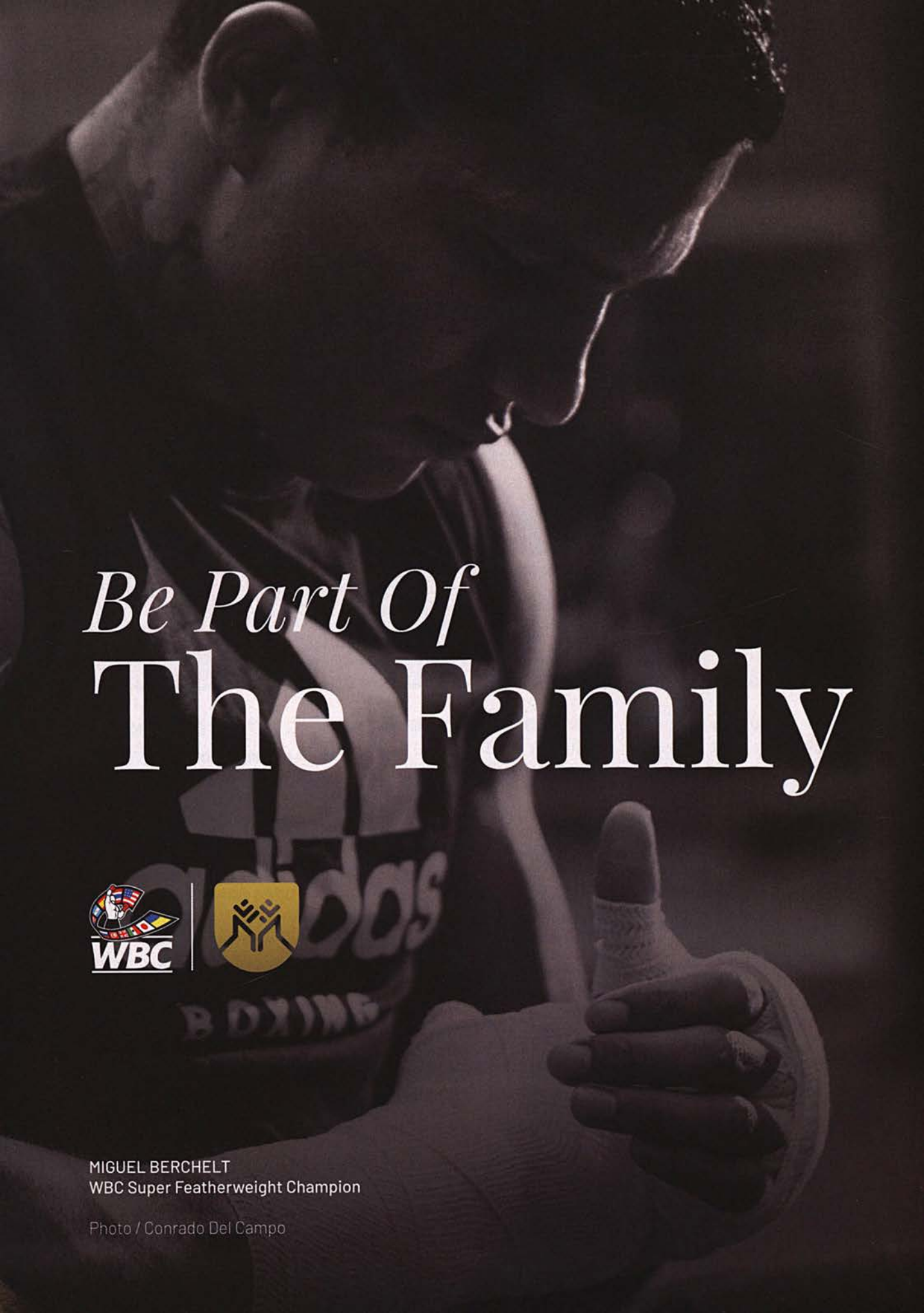
Devin Haney is an unbeaten 135-pound titleholder, but does he feature in Garcia's immediate plans?

COVER PHOTO BY SYE WILLIAMS; ART/GEORGIA YOUNG; GROOMING DEMI ELISE



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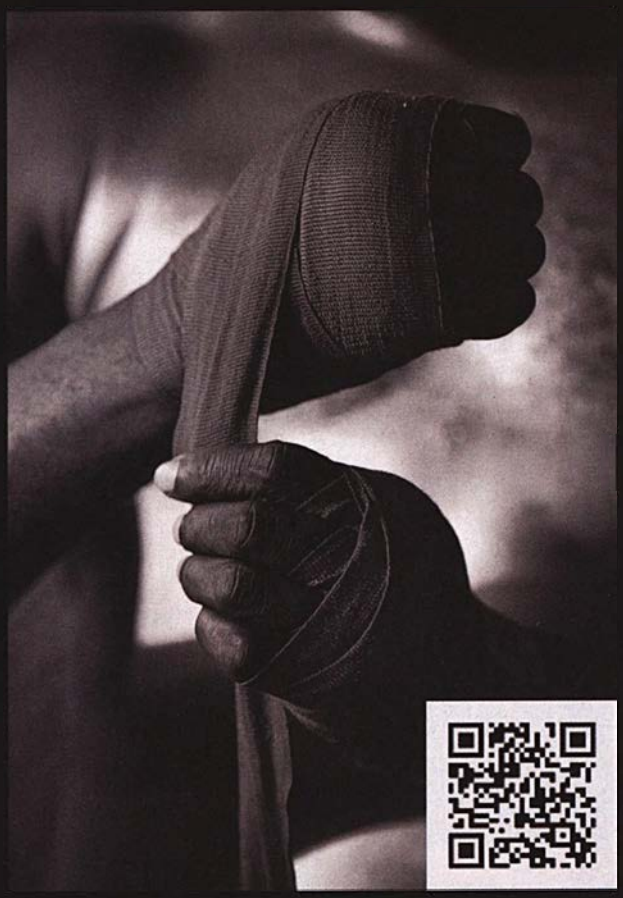

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Richard Commey (left) returned to action for the first time since suffering a second-round stoppage loss to Teofimo Lopez and posted a sixth-round knockout of Jackson Marinez.

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THE BOY BECOMES A MAN

I was surprised by young Ryan Garcia's grand entrance to the ring. I was like: Really? You kidding me? The kid has accomplished nothing just yet! Then the fight began. And finished. Let me share with you a couple of feelings. I'll keep it short:

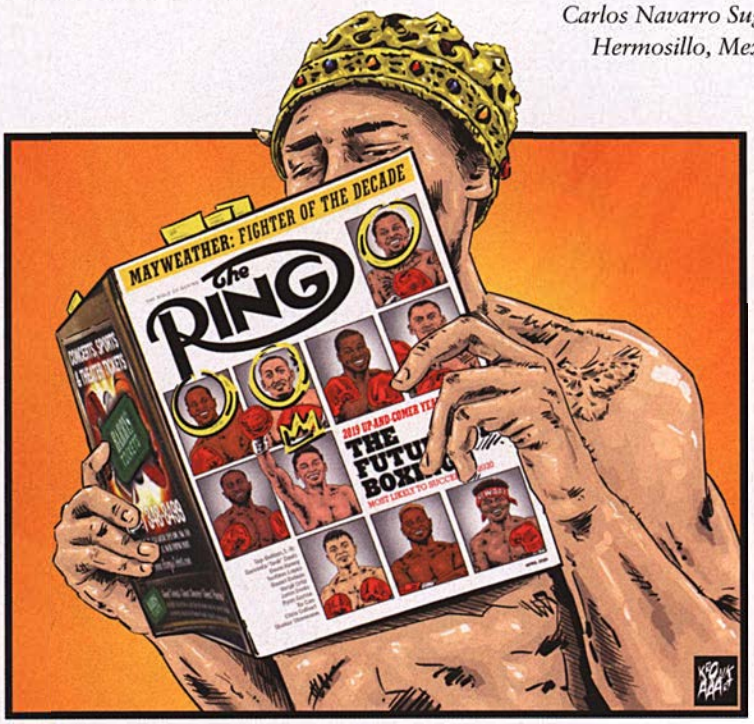
I thought Garcia was in danger of impersonating Amir Khan's career when I saw his ass sweeping the canvas for the first time.

I was satisfied to see the kid's reaction to the hard reality: The walks in the park are forever over, boy. He adjusted his game plan, kept using his skill set and showed a true champion's grit. He didn't panic and didn't overreact. Kudos to Eddy Reynoso, by the way. What a great trainer the dude has become.

The boy really trusts his power. And REALLY has self confidence, and – I'm calculating the next statement – is NOT as arrogant as it may seem. I absolutely loved how he took being dropped for the first time in his career as a learning experience and showed some respect to his rival. He was very lighthearted about the knockdown. The guy knows how to entertain as much as he knows how to box.

I liked what I saw a lot. Boxing can definitely use a couple of players like Ryan Garcia to attract more casual fans to the game. I can't wait to see him share the ring with the beasts of his division.

Carlos Navarro Sugich
Hermosillo, Mexico



DON'T MESS THIS UP, BOXING

It's been a while since there were so many talented-yet-young fighters in the same weight class as the lightweight division right now. Put any one of Devin Haney, Teofimo Lopez, Ryan Garcia or Tank Davis in with each other and I'm inviting people over for a party (safely soon, fingers crossed). Please tell me I'm not wasting my time looking forward to these matchups and none of them happen. Please give us fight fans some hope that we don't waste our time following a dumb sport. Please tell me boxing is not going to mess this up.

Gordon Allen
Los Angeles

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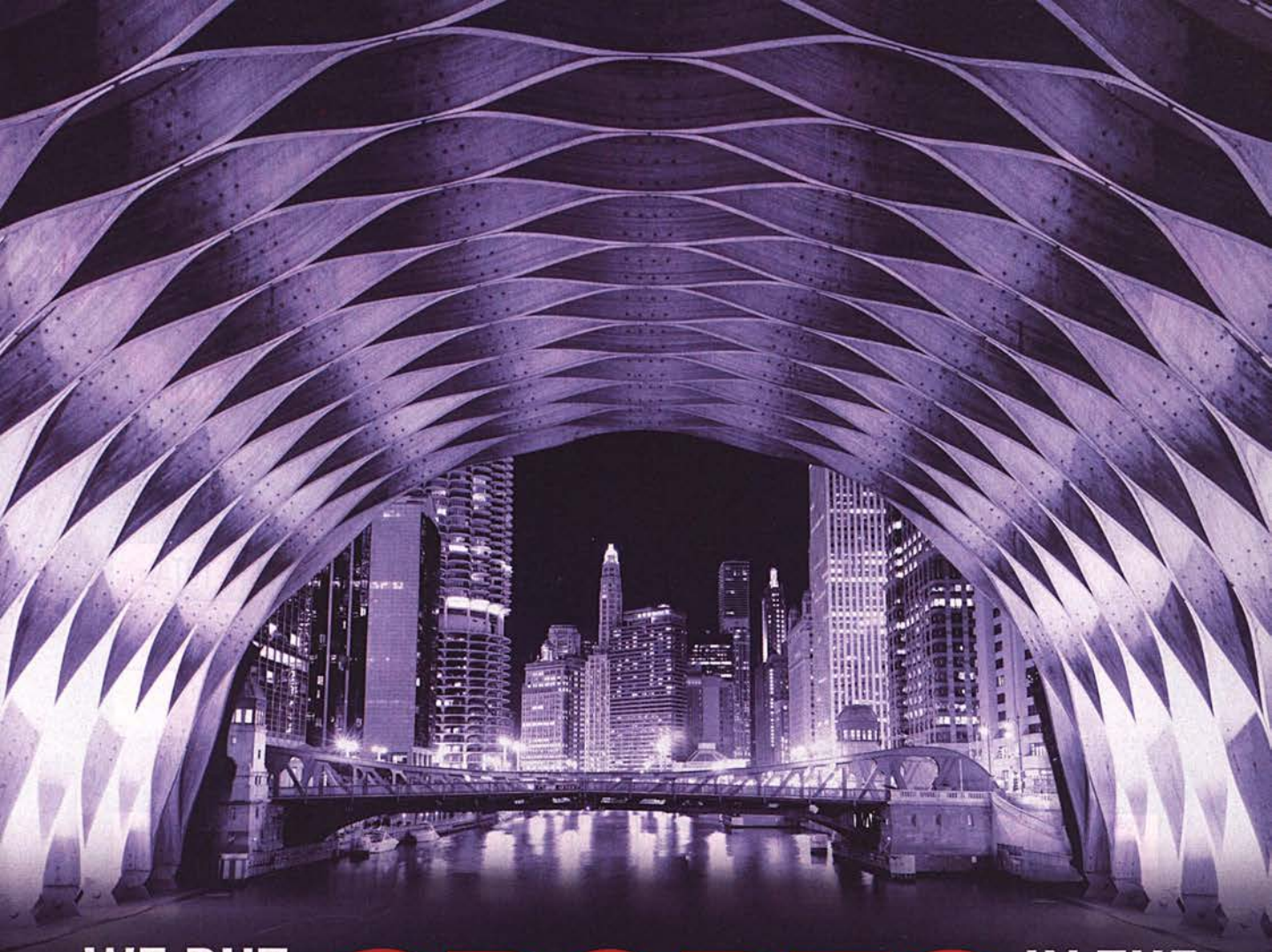

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RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

CANELO'S BUSY SCHEDULE TRIGGERS A '90S FLASHBACK

Pound-for-pound king Canelo Alvarez and Turkish challenger Avni Yildirim in Miami.

Last month, I came across a tweet pointing out the age of Avni Yildirim, the first opponent of Canelo Alvarez's 2021 schedule (who will be in the Mexican star's rearview mirror by the time you read this column).

The tweet, from @BatmanBoxing, stated that it was a "curious fact" that Yildirim is the "first fighter under 30 to fight Canelo since Liam Smith in 2016." It listed the ages of Alvarez's last six opponents at the time they fought: Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. (31), Gennadiy Golovkin (35, 36), Rocky Fielding (31), Daniel Jacobs (32), Sergey Kovalev (36) and Callum Smith (30).

I don't know if the author of the tweet was trying to throw shade on the super middleweight champ by suggesting that he faces past-prime opposition or if he was just pointing out an interesting fact, but it got me thinking about the top super middleweights who are under 30 and who among them is experienced enough to deal with what Alvarez brings to the big dance. And that got me thinking about fighter activity and how it factors into an up-and-comer's ability to seize an opportunity and create the kind of career momentum that can evolve a special talent into a pound-for-pound player.

David Benavidez and Caleb Plant are Nos. 1 and 2 in The Ring's 168-pound rankings. Both are gifted athletes in their 20s. Benavidez, the youngest of the Ring-rated super middleweights at 24, is a big, strong, fierce, combination-throwing pressure fighter, but the Phoenix native only has 23 pro bouts under his belt in an eight-year career. (It should be 24 by the time this column sees print, as Benavidez was scheduled to face Ronald Ellis on March 3.)

Benavidez has been on a one-or-two-fight-per-year schedule since his rematch with Ronald Gavril in 2018.

Plant, the IBF titleholder who has been on Canelo's radar since last year, has also fought once or twice a year since 2018, when he outpointed Rogelio "Porky" Medina. The 28-year-old Nashville native is a skilled southpaw with fast hands and feet, but he's only compiled 21 fights in seven years.

If Plant gets his shot at Canelo, which has been proposed for the second half

of this year, what do you think the majority of fans and media are going to say about "Sweet Hands" prior to and, most likely, after the bout? (Spoiler: They're going to say he wasn't ready.)

One only has to glance at Plant's and Benavidez's records on BoxRec.com to figure out that as soon as they established themselves as "world class" – both let the boxing world know they had promise by dominating Medina (Benavidez in 2017, Plant in 2018) – they seemed less interested in fighting three to four times a year.

The lack of legitimate contenders on their records also stands out. Plant has faced two opponents that were Ring-rated, Caleb Truax and Jose Uzcategui, whom he outpointed for the IBF belt in January 2019. Benavidez has faced just one Ring-rated opponent, Anthony Dirrell, whom he stopped in nine rounds in September 2019.

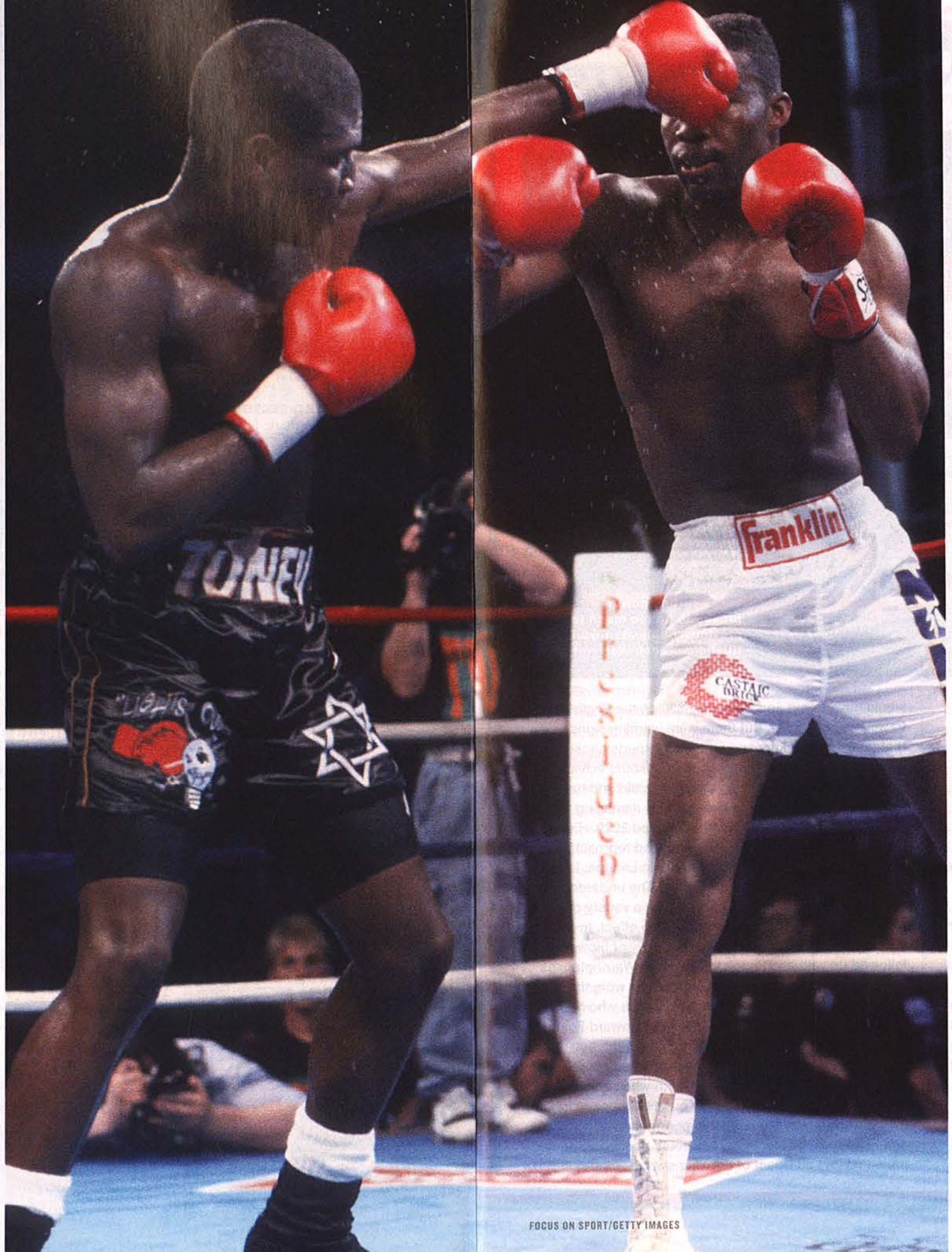
I don't mean to pick on Benavidez and Plant. The resumes of the other super middleweight standouts are paper-thin. George Groves was the only quality fighter that former Ring champ Callum Smith had faced before he was outclassed by Alvarez in December. Billy Joe Saunders has yet to fight a Ring-rated super middleweight. The undefeated WBO beltholder faced all of his notable opponents at middleweight, although John Ryder, Chris Eubank Jr. and David Lemieux have since been ranked at 168 pounds.

There are many reasons for the weak resumes that we see among world-rated fighters in every weight class, but fighting once or twice a year, as Saunders has done since 2014 and Smith has done since 2017, isn't helping.

The 1990s hosted the last generation of world-class boxers that maintained busy fight schedules after winning their first world titles or establishing themselves at the elite level. The frequency of ring appearances by ferocious up-and-comers Terry Norris and James Toney (two of my favorites during the early part of the decade) helped transform me into a hardcore fan.

Busy schedules and tough fights prepared both fighters to explode onto the scene in 1991. Norris did it by hammering Sugar Ray Leonard for 12 rounds in February. Three months later, Toney scored a come-from-behind KO of Michael Nunn for the IBF middleweight title (as a 20-1 underdog).

Norris was young (23) but battle-tested going into his showdown with Leonard (a 3-1 favorite). "Terrible" Terry fought nine times in 1987 and six times in both 1988 and 1989 vs. quality opposition that included former and future beltholders, and resulted in a few setbacks, notably a chilling second-round stoppage loss to KO king Julian Jackson in Norris' first shot at a world title. But Norris was ready for his second title attempt, an opening-round blitzing of John Mugabi in 1990, and the WBC 154-pound belt he lifted from the faded "Beast" was his ticket to a showdown with my boyhood idol.



Toney was on an active schedule heading into his bout with then-titleholder Michael Nunn.

The month before Norris-Leonard, Toney passed a gut check against fellow prospect Merqui Sosa, an ESPN-televised 12-rounder that would earn him the biggest opportunity of his budding career. With almost zero amateur experience and less than three years as a professional, the 22-year-old Toney had no business toppling the undefeated (36-0) Nunn a few months later, but "Lights Out" was ready to rumble, having fought 12 times in 1989 and 10 times in 1990.

Toney fought six times in '91, including title defenses against top-rated Reggie Johnson and future Hall of Famer Mike McCallum, which earned him The Ring's Fighter of the Year award. Norris was a Fighter of the Year runner-up with a four-bout 1991 that included dominant performances against former champ Donald Curry and future titleholder Jorge Castro. Toney and Norris remained fighting champions throughout the mid-1990s.

Toney fought between five and seven times a year from 1992 to 1996. Norris would keep a three-to-four-bout schedule until 1997. By the late '90s, I was covering Oscar De La Hoya and Shane Mosley title bouts from press row, and while not as busy as Toney and Norris, the new faces of the sport made the most of their prime years.

De La Hoya, only 24, fought five times in '97, starting the year with back-to-back bouts against undefeated (41-0) Miguel Angel Gonzalez and the great Pernell Whitaker. Mosley, age 26 going into his first bout of 1998, fought five times that year, earning the Fighter of the Year award from the Boxing Writers Association of America.

Ring Magazine's choice for Fighter of the Year in 1998 was Floyd Mayweather Jr., who at 21 was one of the youngest-ever recipients of the award. The "Pretty Boy" fought seven times that year.

Nobody's doing it like that anymore, but Canelo, at the "ripe old age" of 30, is giving it a try this year. After his February 27 date with Yildirim, he plans to fight in May (vs. Saunders), September and December (with Plant and Golovkin as potential opponents).

Four bouts in 2021, five bouts in a 12-month span, with the goal of being the undisputed super middleweight champ by the end of the year. It's an ambitious plan, and hopefully inspirational to other fighters if he can pull it off.

If only the other super middleweights, especially Benavidez and Plant, could be as ambitious or as active as the young guns of the '90s. If they had that type of activity, I'd actually give them a shot at beating Canelo.

FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

Lara's hitting power proved to be too much for previously unbeaten world titleholder Josh Warrington.

MAURICIO LARA

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Josh Warrington was unbeaten; he was The Ring's No. 1-rated featherweight, and a lucrative matchup against Xu Can looked all but set for 2021. Even relinquishing his IBF title had an upside because Warrington was targeting the vacant Ring Magazine championship, which would be on the line in the Xu fight. The only downside was an extended layoff – 16 months – which was due to the pandemic and a variety of fight dates falling through for other reasons. Warrington, therefore, planned to shake off the ring rust before adding to his growing list of world-class victims, which included Lee Selby, Carl Frampton and Kid Galahad.

Despite a respectable 21-2 record, Mauricio Lara had never mixed with anything resembling Warrington in a six-year professional career. The Mexico City product had lost his pro debut by split decision and suffered a first-round knockout loss to a 5-1-1 novice in May 2018. If you were placing a bet on Warrington to win, you would have to put approximately $20 on the Englishman to win a single dollar. But there were warning signs that fans, oddsmakers and so-called experts chose to ignore. Firstly, Lara had scored 14 knockouts in his 21 wins. Second, he turned pro at 16 years old and has maintained a breakneck schedule, even managing to fit in four fights during a COVID-drenched 2020. His hunger and desire were therefore beyond reproach, and on February 13 at the Wembley Arena in London, Lara brought everything he had to the ring. The underdog made his mark in Round 1, scoring with a variety of meaty headshots that had an immediate effect. In the fourth, he struck again with a furious bevy of blows and followed up with a left hook knockdown. Warrington, as game as they come, found his feet, but he wore the look – and possessed the equilibrium – of a man who had downed one too many tequilas. Referee Howard Foster came under scrutiny for not stopping the fight, but Warrington continued to be competitive in spots. Lara finally broke through again in the ninth when a series of powerful blows, punctuated by a huge left hook, ended the contest. It was a sensational performance by Lara, and Fighter of the Month honors could conceivably transition into an Upset of the Year award.

NEW FACES:

RICHARDSON HITCHINS

By **Anson Wainwright**

AGE: 23
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, New York
WEIGHT CLASS: Junior welterweight
HEIGHT/ REACH: 5-foot-10 (178 cm) / 74 inches (188 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 125-15 (roughly)
TURNED PRO: 2017
PRO RECORD: 12-0 (5 knockouts)
TRAINER: Leonard Wilson
MANAGER: No manager
PROMOTER: Mayweather Promotions
TWITTER: @HelsRichardson

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Hitchins believes his most recent performance – a split decision win over former 130-pound titleholder Algenis Mendez – stands out the most.

"[Mendez] had only lost to top guys and I dominated the fight easy," Hitchins told The Ring. "I just boxed him. He was real crafty, experienced and patient. He was strong and kept his hands up; he didn't give me too many openings, so I took what he gave me.

"I could [have gone] a different route and fought someone that wasn't [going to] pose a threat. My promotional company believes in me, and I believe in myself."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: The skilled New Yorker is largely happy with his performances to date.

"I've never been disappointed in any victory," he said. "There's probably a few guys early in my career that I didn't knock out. It doesn't matter how I got it done as long as I got it done."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: Hitchins had an extensive amateur career. He won 141-pound titles at the 2014 National PAL Championships (17-18 age group) and the 2015 Ringside Tournament (open class). However, he lost at the quarterfinals of the Golden Gloves to Jaron Ennis in 2015 and to Vergil Ortiz at the same stage of the tournament the following year.

Hitchins attempted to earn a berth on the U.S. Olympic team but had to go a different route to secure his passage to the 2016 Summer Games.

"I fell short in the Olympic trials," he explained. "I went to Azerbaijan and qualified and earned my spot to represent Haiti at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"It was a great experience. It helped mold me into the boxer I am today, as far as experience. The amateur and pro ranks are two different ball games. I think my style is more suited to the pros, because my style is not as a fast starter. I'm more of a sharpshooter; I slowly break you down. As the rounds go, I get your timing more and more and pick you apart."

Hitchins has gained invaluable experience sparring world-class boxers such as Terence Crawford, Devin Haney, Gervonta Davis and Shakur Stevenson.

"My number one asset is that I have tremendous defense, even though I only have 12 fights. I think I haven't really taken any punishment in any of the fights. I have speed, but I have great timing. That will help me get to the top level. Boxing's all about timing."

Hitchins' promoter, Floyd Mayweather Jr., who happens to be one of the best defensive boxers of this era, recently helped him refine his technique when he spent some time at the Mayweather Boxing Club in Las Vegas during the pandemic.

"[Floyd] was real hands-on with me. He was showing me different things to incorporate into my game," he said.

Former Ring editor-in-chief Steve Farhood, who now serves as an on-air analyst for ShoBox, has observed several of Hitchins' fights and sees potential.

"Hitchins has the look of a fighter with excellent amateur pedigree. He's very comfortable in the ring," said Farhood. "His style is plain to see: He's a pure boxer who relies on a sterling jab and the occasional right hand.

"The x-factor in his development is his close tie to Floyd Mayweather, who works extensively with Hitchins. That presumably will pay major dividends.

"If Hitchins can maintain his jab-and-move style for 10 or 12 rounds, he can become a factor in the upper echelon of the 140-pound division."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Farhood feels there are two things Hitchins needs to improve on if he is to reach the top.

"Largely missing is a left hook," said Farhood. "Moreover, as fights progress into the later rounds, Hitchins has slowed a bit, prompting him to hold more than we'd like to see. If he slows late in fights versus aggressive and/or physical junior welters, he'll fall a bit short."

HItchins says he will add to his arsenal and overall game as his career progresses.

"What I need to work on is getting experience, getting them different looks," he said. "I think I'm a complete boxer. I can fight on the inside, I can fight on the outside. I can use my legs to box and move. I can counterpunch. I'm a pure boxer. I can always get better; everything I do good, I can do better."

STORYLINES: Hitchins was born and brought up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. As a youngster, he was more interested in music. However, Mayweather caught his attention by participating in a WWE event in 2008 and Hitchins began his path into boxing at 12 years old.

"As a kid, I wanted to be a singer or a rapper," he explained. "But when I came into a boxing gym, it was fun, just something to learn how to do.

"I was always a street fighter, so I had the advantage over people, but my coach told me if you don't come to the gym every day, I'm not going to show you how to box.

"Then after that I started seeing the kids coming to the gym with belts, winning nationals, and I wanted to be a part of that. And after that, I fell in love with the sport. I slowly realized I had God-given abilities."

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The Boxing Writers Association of America has announced the winners of its annual awards. Bestowing these honors is an important trust. It places each winner in the company of legends.

The Trainer of the Year for 2020 is Teofimo Lopez Sr. The other nominees were Sugar Hill, Derrick James, Robert Garcia and Eddy Reynoso. Typically, the honor goes to someone who has an elite fighter in his stable. Extra credit goes to a trainer who has developed a champion from scratch. Either way, as Don Turner (who was honored in 1996 for his work with Evander Holyfield) observed, "The fighter makes the trainer, not the other way around."

I would have added another name to the ballot for Trainer of the Year: Mark Breland.

One can argue that he didn't belong on the ballot. Although Breland taught Deontay Wilder to leverage his right hand (which is powered by a gift of nature) and improved Wilder's jab, Deontay doesn't fight like a well-schooled fighter.

But there's another factor to be considered.

On February 22, 2020, Wilder was absorbing a brutal beating at the hands of Tyson Fury when Breland (Deontay's chief second) threw in the towel. Thereafter, Wilder accused Kenny Bayless of refereeing the fight as though he were drunk and participating in a conspiracy against him. He accused Fury of using loaded gloves. He said he lost because the outlandish costume that he wore for his ring walk was so heavy that it weakened his legs.

But Wilder's ugliest character assassination was reserved for Breland (widely regarded as one of the most decent people in boxing), whom he later dismissed as his trainer.

Knowing when to stop a fight is an important part of a trainer's job. There are too many "brave" trainers who don't know when to stop a fight. We've all seen examples of that and the tragedy that sometimes follows.

Wilder put the spotlight on Breland when he trashed and then dismissed him for doing his job. Breland deserved to be on the ballot for Trainer of the Year as a statement of principle and an acknowledgement that he did his job when it mattered most.

★ ★ ★

The pandemic has left boxing fans with a lot of free time on our hands and too few good fights to fill it. YouTube offers an endless stream of old and new fights to fill the void. But that's not all there is insofar as the sweet science is concerned. Documentaries, interviews. You name it and YouTube has it.

Recently, I was on YouTube and came across an interview that Michael Kay conducted with George Foreman on the YES Network in 2004. It's 45 minutes long and worth watching, particularly as it relates to some of Foreman's comments regarding the Rumble in the Jungle against Muhammad Ali:

- "One day, you're going through the airport, going to Africa, and everybody is afraid of you. 'There's George.' Then, coming back from Africa, they're patting you on the back. 'It's all right. You'll be OK.' From praise to pity. I've never been so devastated in my life."
- "I beat this guy up and I beat him good. No one had ever stood up to my punching power. Then, seventh round, I hit him and I thought he was gonna fall. And he said, 'Is that all you got, George?' That was all I had, too."
- "Muhammad Ali was training to win the fight with me. I was training to kill him. I'm thinking, 'I'm gonna mount that head on my wall.' And he's thinking, 'I'm gonna win a boxing match.'"
- "I saw *When We Were Kings*. My kids are laughing. I'm thinking, 'That's not funny. I'm on the canvas, you know. Every joke he tells, they're laughing. I found myself laughing with them."
- "I've fallen in love all over again with Muhammad Ali. I think he needed that victory back then a lot more than I needed it."

And there was a nice coda when Foreman told Kay, "I'm so happy about the way my life has gone, I wouldn't want to change anything about it."

Mark Breland served as co-trainer to former WBC heavyweight titleholder Deontay Wilder from 2008 until 2020.

★★★

No one has a more passionate relationship with boxing than Hall of Fame promoter Lou DiBella. And no one is more critical of the business end of the sport. Interviews with DiBella often have the feel of a therapy session. Among the thoughts he has offered over the years are:

- "It's hard to get into boxing and not love it. And it's hard to get into boxing and not hate it."
- "I can't say that I enjoy the business, but it's addictive. There's a part of me that wonders if I wouldn't be happier if I redirected away from it. But there's also part of me that loves the sport and loves the fighters and thinks I can make money and have a positive impact on boxing at the same time."
- "There are no rules in boxing. People get away with what they can."
- "Boxing is a miserable business. Everything is a deal. People lie all the time and don't even consider it lying. Sooner or later, virtually everyone adopts a go-along mentality or they get crushed. If you stay in this business long enough, you're going to get fucked as many times as a porn star."
- "The old saying 'what goes around comes around' doesn't apply to boxing."

★★★

My Brother, Muhammad Ali by Rahaman Ali with Fiaz Rafiq (Rowman & Littlefield) styles itself as the "definitive" Ali biography. It isn't. That becomes clear early in the book when Rahaman repeats the long-discredited claim that Cassius Clay threw his Olympic gold medal in the Ohio River after being denied service at a Louisville restaurant.

Lou DiBella says the boxing business is "miserable" but can't bring himself to leave it.

The gold medal tale had its origins in Ali's 1976 "autobiography" – *The Greatest: My Own Story* – published by Random House and ghostwritten by Richard Durham (an editor for the Nation of Islam newspaper, Muhammad Speaks). Before any material was submitted to Random House, each page had to be approved and initialed by Herbert Muhammad (Ali's manager and the son of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad).

"I'm not sure the book is the true story of Ali's life," Random House editor-in-chief James Silberman, who helped edit the manuscript, later acknowledged. "Where corroborative sources were available for events such as fights, it was accurate. But there were stretches where there was no source other than Herbert or Ali himself."

As recounted in *The Greatest*, Cassius and a friend named Ronnie King were refused service in a "whites only" restaurant after Clay returned home to Louisville following the Olympics. That led to a confrontation with a motorcycle gang, whereupon Cassius threw his gold medal off the Jefferson County Bridge into the river.

The tale – to put it politely – was allegorical. Ali later acknowledged that either the medal was stolen or he lost it. Now Rahaman is reviving the myth. Only in Rahaman's version, Ronnie King and the motorcycle gang have been airbrushed out. Rahaman was the one with Cassius on the bridge. And the incident was precipitated by Cassius ordering a cheeseburger in the restaurant; the waitress saying, "We don't serve Negroes," and Cassius responding, "I don't eat them, either."

That punchline, by the way, was the creation of Dick Gregory, the trailblazing comedian and social activist who began performing in the late-1950s. Years later in public speaking engagements, Ali appropriated it.

So much for the "definitive" Ali biography.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In December 2019, he was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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THE REALITY THAT FIGHTERS FACE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

THE FACE OF BOXING

Boxing fans cheer when a fighter beats another fighter into submission. Wojtek Urbanek has mixed emotions.

"I'm a portrait photographer," Urbanek says. "I talk with these people. They're generous with their time. They sit for me in front of my camera. Almost always, I like them. Then they fight and I have to confront the brutality of the punishment that they inflict on each other and the suffering that they endure."

The photograph on the right was taken moments after Gennadiy Golovkin knocked out Steve Rolls at Madison Square Garden on June 8, 2019. The photos below of Brendan Barrett and Calvin Metcalf were taken at Sony Hall in New York on April 10, 2019. Rolls, Barrett, and Metcalf were "opponents." They were brought in to lose and did.

"For Golovkin and Rolls," Urbanek remembers, "I was sitting in the auxiliary press section, which is far away from the ring. For the whole fight, my eye was glued to my telephoto lens. Then the fight ended. There was wild celebration. I put down my camera. And suddenly I said to myself, 'Wait a minute! The story is still going on.' That was a powerful moment for me.

"With Brendan Barrett," Wojtek continues, "there were moments when the fight seemed surreal. One day earlier, Barrett was a healthy, strong, confident man. I photographed him at the weigh-in. He was happy. And then he was beaten down in front of my eyes. As a photographer, I want to capture these brutal moments. But as a person, I was conflicted. I realized what a personal tragedy it was for him.

"Calvin Metcalf was at the same weigh-in. He seemed like a gentle soul, quiet, very likable. His fight

CALVIN METCALF

BRENDAN BARRETT

was a hunt that he had no chance to win. If I was bleeding from the head like that, I'd panic, stop whatever I was doing and go to the hospital. I'd fight for the lives of my family like that, but not for the small amount of money that he was paid. I asked myself during that fight, 'What's inside this man that makes him this way?' To see him – always trying to win, getting beaten up – was hard for me. But he was courageous and survived the full six rounds.

"Boxing is a bloody spectacle," Urbanek says in closing. "In some ways, we haven't changed that much since the days of the Roman Colosseum. Sometimes I wonder why I'm taking photographs like this. And sometimes I can't imagine not doing it." RING

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.

RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of Feb. 13, 2021

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY BRIAN HARTY

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: The Battle of the Calebs wasn't quite as biblical as it sounds, with Caleb Plant (No. 2 last month) easily defending his IBF title with a 12-round shutout of 37-year-old Caleb Truax (No. 6), who now seems to have officially gotten all he can out of his name-making upset of James DeGale in 2017. The quick-fisted Plant's performance was dominant in the target-practice sense, but many on the Ratings Panel thought he should've crushed such a ripe opponent, so opinions were split on whether he should take the top spot from David Benavidez.

Plant plants his fellow Caleb with a big right-hand shot.

The case for Plant was summed up by one panelist: "Jose Uzcategui and Truax are two top 10 wins. Both Plant and Benavidez have fairly thin resumes, in my opinion. But I think Plant deserves credit over Benavidez for his professionalism. He has always made weight. He hasn't lost two belts outside the ring. With two pretty even fighters, I think Plant's professionalism gets the nod for me."

The majority acknowledged Benavidez's precarious position but just wanted a more emphatic performance from Plant before promoting him. The decision to drop Truax was uncontested, however, and his departure made room for Edgar Berlanga at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No. 9-rated Patrick Teixeira's height and reach advantages were of no consequence against the constant pressure of Brian Castano, who snatched the WBO title with a near-shutout decision. Castano rose from No. 5 to No. 3 and Teixeira exited the list, which – speaking of height – created a vacancy at No. 10 for Sebastian Fundora, who is half an inch short of being eye-to-eye with Anthony Joshua.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Robert Easter (No. 5 last month) hasn't fought at 135 since April 2019 and was scheduled for his second junior welterweight bout in a row, so he was dropped and 22-year-old Mexican Isaac "Pitbull" Cruz came in at No. 10. Richard Commey, who marks the line between "the elite" and "the others" in this lightweight-themed issue of The Ring, rebounded from his second-round loss to Teofimo Lopez in 2019 with a sixth-round knockout of Jackson Marinez (unrated) and remained at No. 4.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Joseph Diaz Jr. (No. 3) got off to a bad start by horribly missing weight for his IBF title defense against then-unrated Russian Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov, and the letdown continued for "Jo Jo" when a majority draw was announced (a combination of fails that sent the belt spinning off into limbo). The fight was by no means a disgrace, though, so Diaz held his position on the list and Rakhimov entered at No. 6.

FEATHERWEIGHT: In the clear upset of the month, Josh Warrington vs. Mauricio Lara began as a No. 1 vs. No. nothing matchup and ended with Warrington on the canvas with a hand waving above him in Round 9. Check page 12 for more on that. Ratings-wise, the victorious Mexican settled in at No. 4 and Warrington slipped to No. 5, with a few panelists suggesting that he should fall farther.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Not especially known to favor phone booths, jab specialist Stephen Fulton upped his versatility score with a body-banging unanimous decision over Angelo Leo to capture the WBO title. Fulton also reaped a hefty ratings hike, moving from No. 10 to No. 3 while the very game Leo remained at No. 6. Some on the Ratings Panel were hesitant to put Fulton over Ryosuke Iwasa, but the general sentiment was that the undefeated American wins the eye test over the more experienced titleholder from Japan.

On the same Showtime-televised card in Connecticut, Raeese Aleem was also impressive with an 11th-round stoppage of the previously undefeated Vic Pasillas (unrated), who met the canvas four times courtesy of some loopy overhand rights. Aleem entered the list at No. 8. At the same time, No. 1-rated Rey Vargas was let go after vacating his WBC belt and announcing a move to featherweight. Vargas' most recent victim, Tomoki Kameda (No. 8 last month), who has been winless at 122 for more than three years, was also dropped in favor of giving the No. 10 spot to unbeaten Arizona native Carlos Castro.

In a pair of fights on the Diaz-Rakhimov undercard, Azat Hovhannisyan scored an eighth-round knockout of Enrique Bernache and Ronny Rios won a wide unanimous decision over Oscar Negrete. Hovhannisyan held his position at No. 9, and Rios replaced Carlos Castro at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHT: In moving up to face Rios, Negrete gave up his No. 9 ranking at 118 pounds, which made room for Gary Antonio "Don't Leave Out the Middle Name" Russell at No. 10. The younger brother of No. 1-rated featherweight Gary Russell Jr. is coming off a technical decision over Juan Carlos Payano in December.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 54-1-2 (36 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
4. **ALEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
5. **ERROL SPENCE JR.** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** — U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
7. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 14-2-0 (12 KOs)
8. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** — Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
9. **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
10. **KAZUTO IOKA** — Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

Many felt that Kazuto Ioka was long overdue for pound-for-pound recognition, and the four-weight world titlist finally debuted at No. 10 following a TKO win over Kosei Tanaka.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC — U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
- 1 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO — U.K. • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **DEONTAY WILDER** — U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
- 3 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN** — Russia • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- 4 **DILLIAN WHYTE** — U.K. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 5 **LUIS ORTIZ** — Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- 6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.** — U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAEL HUNTER** — U.S. • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- 9 **OSCAR RIVAS** — Colombia • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 10 **ALEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF — Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** — Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC — Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- 3 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** — Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **KEVIN LERENA** — S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **ANDREW TABITI** — U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** — U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA — France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 8 **THABISO MCHUNU** — S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)
- 9 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 12-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 10 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC — Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA — Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **SERGEY KOVALEV** — Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)
- 4 **JOE SMITH JR.** — U.S. • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 5 **JEAN PASCAL** — Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)
- 6 **BADOU JACK** — Sweden • 23-3-3 (13 KOs)
- 7 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ** — Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 8 **MARCUS BROWNE** — U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **UMAR SALAMOV** — Russia • 25-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 10 **LYNDON ARTHUR** — U.K. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC — Mexico • 54-1-2 (36 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** IBF — U.S. • 21-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** — U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 5 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO — U.K. • 30-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 6 **JOHN RYDER** — U.K. • 29-5-0 (16 KOs)
- 7 **FEDOR CHUDINOV** — Russia • 23-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
- 9 **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)
- 10 **EDGAR BERLANGA** — U.S. • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 13, 2021

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **7** **ROB BRANT**
  U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
- **9** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **10** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **1** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 27-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **3** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **4** **JEISON ROSARIO**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **5** **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 16-0-1 (11 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** WBA
  Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 26-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS**
  Russia • 16-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10** **MIKEY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 40-1-0 (30 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **KIRYL RELIKH**
  Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **9** **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV**
  Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

Brian Castano (left) moved up to the No. 3 position at 154 pounds with a one-sided triumph over Patrick Teixeira, who dropped out of the rankings.

Following his stunning ninth-round stoppage win over Josh Warrington, Mauricio Lara (right) entered the 126-pound rankings at No. 4. Warrington dropped from No. 1 to No. 5.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **LUKE CAMPBELL**
  U.K. • 20-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- **7** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- **8** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **MASAYOSHI NAKATANI**
  Japan • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 20-1-1 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

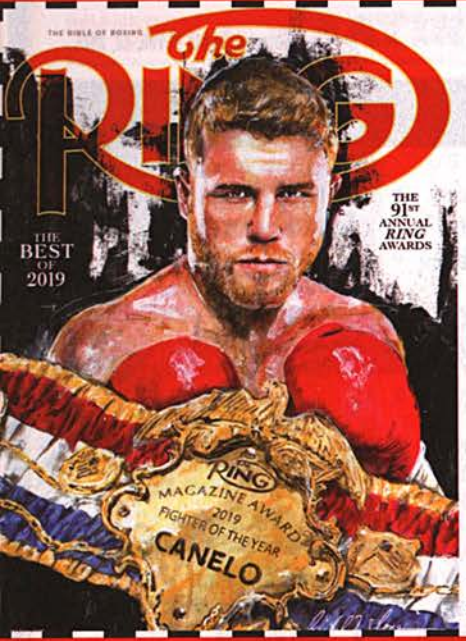
- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** WBC
  Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 31-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- **6** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 15-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **8** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **9** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 25-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **10** **RENE ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 32-9-0 (21 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **3** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (27 KOs)
- **7** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **3** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBO
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **4** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 21-0-1 (16 KOs)
- **6** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- **8** **RAEESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **9** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 19-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)



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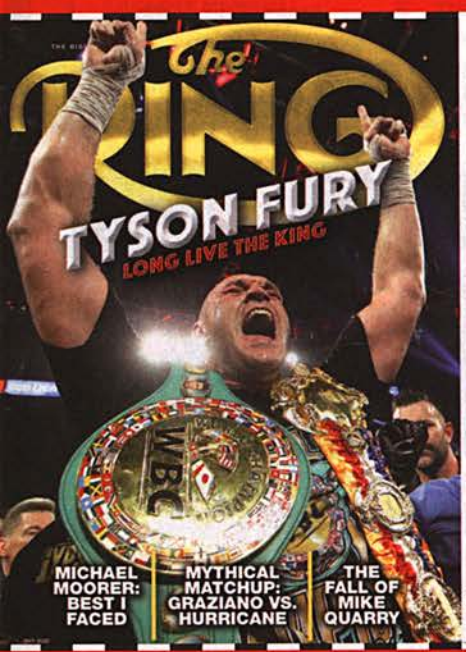

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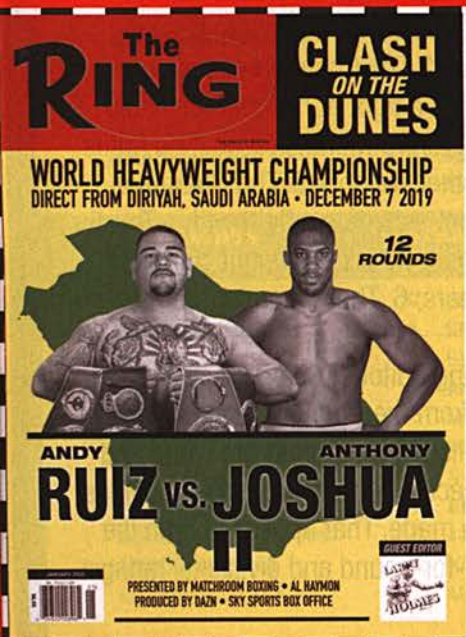

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RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 13, 2021

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
  France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Philippines • 30-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE**
  S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **MIKE PLANIA**
  Philippines • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
  Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 49-5-1 (42 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** WBA
  Nicaragua • 50-2-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **KHALID YAFAI**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 17-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON**
  Puerto Rico • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
  S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **3** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **MASAYUKI KURODA**
  Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **6** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JAY HARRIS**
  U.K. • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **ANGEL ACOSTA**
  Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **9** **JOSELITO VELAZQUEZ**
  Mexico • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 20-4-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 36-2-0 (31 KOs)
- **3** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA**
  Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO**
  Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA**
  Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)
- **9** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

Stephen Fulton (right) moved to No. 3 at 122 pounds with a unanimous decision win over Angelo Leo, who fell to No. 6.

Raeese Aleem (left) entered the 122-pound rankings thanks to a TKO 11 win over Vic Pasillas, who is unrated.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 35-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **BYRON ROJAS**
  Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **6** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
  Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **8** **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
  S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **9** **PEDRO TADURAN** IBF
  Phil. • 14-2-1 (11 KOs)
- **10** **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Phil. • 16-2-0 (10 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Feb. 13, 2021

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 39-1-1 (29 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)

7 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)

9 **MARCELA ACUNA**
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)

10 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **ALICIA NAPOLEON ESPINOSA**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)
5 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
2 **TORI NELSON**
U.S. • 20-2-3 (4 KOs)
3 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **TAYLA HARRIS**
Australia • 7-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CLARESSA SHIELDS** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE** IBF
Canada • 17-0-0 (0 KOs)
3 **HANNA GABRIELS** WBA
Costa Rica • 20-2-1 (11 KOs)
4 **MIKAELA LAUREN**
Sweden • 32-6-0 (13 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JESSICA MCCASKILL** IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)
2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
4 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 20-6-0 (0 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA LINARDATOU** WBO
Greece • 13-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-4-0 (10 KOs)
5 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 17-7-1 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 8-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 **NICOLE WESNER**
Germany • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
2 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 18-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 19-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBO
Puerto Rico • 39-1-1 (29 KOs)
2 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH** WBA, WBC
Canada • 41-10-2 (19 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **HEATHER HARDY**
U.S. • 22-1-0 (4 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN** IBF
U.S. • 18-3-1 (1 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARCELA ACUNA** IBF
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)
2 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 36-4-4 (16 KOs)
3 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)
4 **MAYERLIN RIVAS** WBA
Venezuela • 16-4-2 (10 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 52-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-4-1 (0 KOs)
3 **DEBORA DIONICIUS**
Argentina • 30-2-0 (6 KOs)
4 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 20-3-1 (3 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 54-10-4 (18 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 31-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 30-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 23-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ESMERALDA MORENO**
Mexico • 35-12-2 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 18-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 28-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **AVA KNIGHT**
U.S. • 19-2-5 (5 KOs)
4 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 8-1-0 (1 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA** WBC
Mexico • 32-6-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **YESICA BOPP** WBA
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **TSUNAMI TENKAI** WBO
Japan • 27-12-1 (16 KOs)
4 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 13-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
Mexico • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 10-0-1 (3 KOs)
2 **ANABEL ORTIZ** WBA
Mexico • 31-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 21-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ETSUKO TADA**
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)
5 **KATIA GUTIERREZ**
Mexico • 23-7-0 (6 KOs)

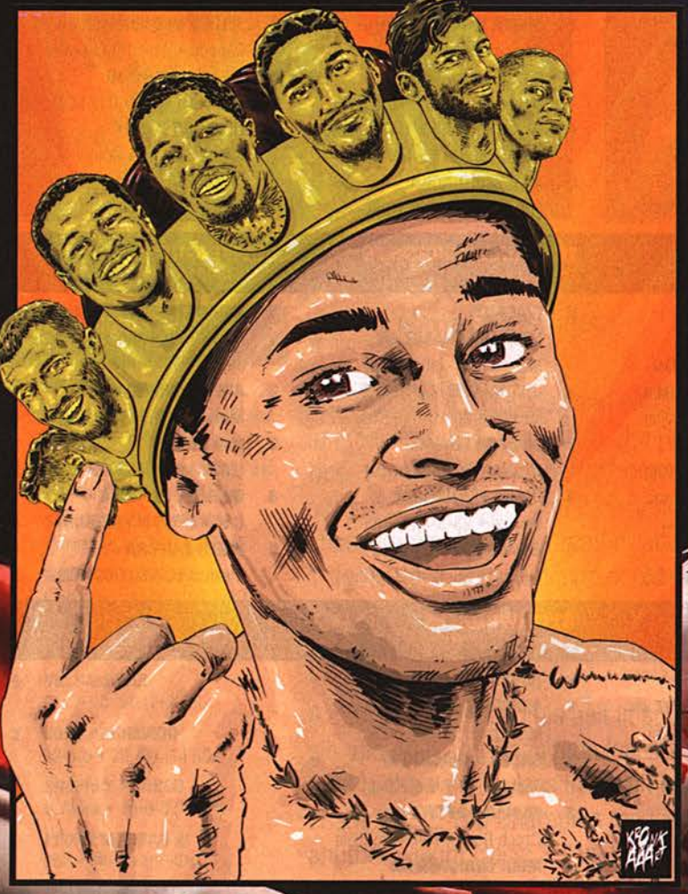
ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 15-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **SAEMI HANAGATA** IBF
Japan • 16-7-4 (7 KOs)
3 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 16-0-1 (5 KOs)
4 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
5 **NAO IKEYAMA**
Japan • 18-6-4 (5 KOs)

POWER PLAY

RYAN GARCIA BLENDS TALENT, CHARM AND SIZE INTO A DYNAMIC LIGHTWEIGHT PACKAGE NOT SEEN SINCE OSCAR DE LA HOYA'S EARLY FIGHTING YEARS, AND LIKE HIS PROMOTER, "KINGRY" WANTS THE BIGGEST AND BEST FIGHTS

By **Tom Gray**



Garcia will never be at a loss for quality opposition in a lightweight division that is bursting with talent.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRONKAAART.COM

PHOTO BY TIM WARNER

He certainly has a sense of himself, and who can blame him?

Unbeaten lightweight star Ryan Garcia is just 22 years old and he's already one of the most exciting fighters in the world today. Despite being massive for the 135-pound limit at 5-foot-10, the Los Angeles-based boxer-puncher would never dream of adopting a risk-free approach in order to prevail in a boring fight. He has an incessant desire to entertain and won't let a three-minute session go by without attempting to inflict concussive damage. As disconcerting as that may be for some purists, that's what most fans pay to see. It's supply and demand, and Garcia wants the world to take notice.

Of course, we've seen all of that before. A big lightweight with an undefeated record and an abundance of killer instinct is hardly a world exclusive. But it's the sum of Garcia's parts that makes him singular; model looks, millions of adoring young women and an insane social media presence (8.5 million Instagram followers and counting) have helped him gravitate toward corporate America before he's even made the jump from contender to world champion. In January, Garcia became the first American boxer ever to sign an endorsement deal with colossal sports beverage franchise Gatorade, a move that can only help inject mainstream visibility into an increasingly marginalized sport. Juxtaposed alongside his in-ring performances, the sky is no longer the limit.

But can one have too much success, particularly at such a tender age? Can Garcia handle the pressure? The Ring's No. 2-rated lightweight has a visceral and astute sense of his own worth, and the only downside to the enormous amount of publicity and attention that

he's received, according to him, is convincing the "haters" that he's an authentic warrior.

"People are always looking to doubt you," Garcia told The Ring in relation to his lofty profile. "Can he become what he says he is? Can he live up to all this? Like LeBron James: Could he live up to expectations when he first came into the league? Could he become what everyone was saying he could become? I'm not comparing ... but even though it's two different sports, it's kind of similar. There are so many opinions out there, and a lot of people are blinded from the truth. They'd rather focus on the negative and say Ryan Garcia is a social media fighter.

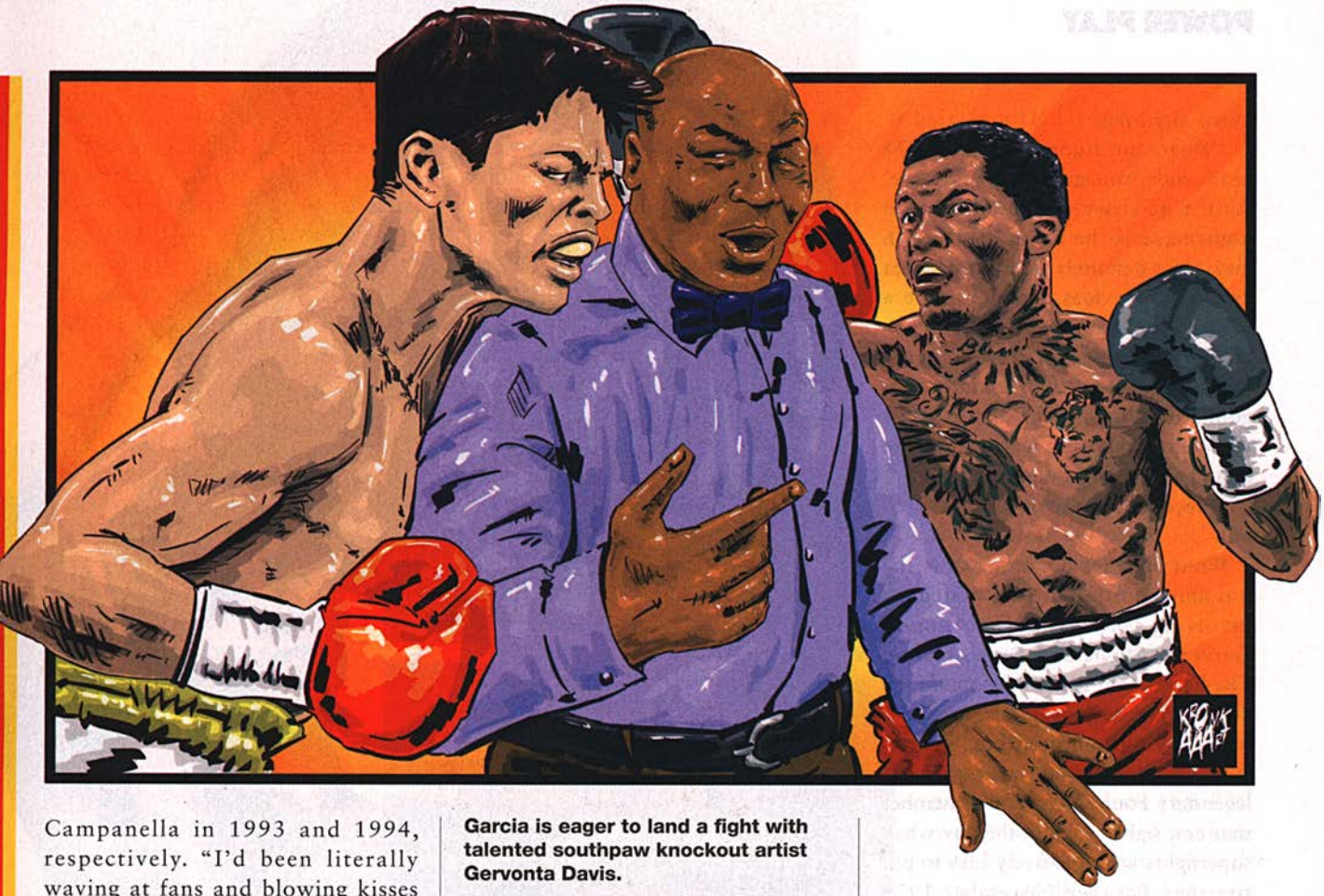
"I just let it flow [in terms of maintaining a strong corporate image]. I see what works and what doesn't work. Anthony Joshua was one person I looked at. Cristiano Ronaldo, Manny Pacquiao. There's a lot of people that I take little things from and then I make it my own. I'm Ryan Garcia, and I will stand for what I believe in. But I'm always open to more knowledge, and if I have to learn certain things about corporate America, I will. Or if I've got to learn about politics, I will. If there's little things that can help me along on my journey, then I'll look into it. But in boxing, it all comes down to who fans want to support. You can't make people like you."

In his most recent showing, an impressive seventh-round stoppage of two-time world title challenger Luke Campbell, Garcia once again proved that there's plenty to like. On January 2 at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, he was knocked down for the first time ever – dropped hard by a big left hand in the second round – but "KingRy" bounced back to electrify the 5,000 fans in attendance with a devastating body-punch finish.

Garcia's promoter, former six-weight titleholder and CEO of Golden Boy Promotions Oscar De La Hoya, can identify with his fighter – as a fighter – in myriad ways. There's the Mexican-American heritage, the matinee idol looks, the female fan base and the pressure that comes with metamorphosing into a marketable superstar. But De La Hoya was also floored during the embryonic stages of his own career and roared back to win by knockout. He's been there and done it.

"When I was knocked down, it was really embarrassing," said De La Hoya, who was dropped by Narciso Valenzuela and Giorgio

Online critics can be ruthless, but Garcia continues to thrive despite all the negativity aimed in his direction.



Garcia is eager to land a fight with talented southpaw knockout artist Gervonta Davis.

Campanella in 1993 and 1994, respectively. "I'd been literally waving at fans and blowing kisses to girls [before the fight]. When I got knocked down, I wanted to destroy my opponent.

"I had a talk with Ryan [after the Campbell bout] and he said it was a great punch, but he didn't feel embarrassed. He said he felt angry at himself for allowing Campbell to land the punch, so he got up and stopped him. Ryan didn't seem hurt, and that was not a flash knockdown. He overcame adversity, showcased his heart, showed us his will, and he demonstrated what he's all about."

Indeed he did, but getting knocked off your feet is not a habit that any fighter wants to pick up. The fans loved the vulnerability of three-division ruler Felix Trinidad, who was down multiple times as a welterweight and always came back to brutalize the perpetrators. But that was more of an isolated case. For the most part, if a fighter gets in the habit of going down, sooner or later they'll run out of luck.

In the fall of 2018, Garcia acquired the services of acclaimed coach Eddy Reynoso, who will doubtless be able to iron out the young fighter's flaws in the years to come. The Ring Magazine Trainer of the Year for 2019 has worked wonders with Mexican icon Canelo Alvarez, developing him from explosive, albeit static, boxer-slugger to complete pro, four-weight world champion and pound-for-pound No. 1.

"Ryan is a very talented fighter with a lot of physical capabilities," Reynoso told The Ring through Gabriel Rivas. "He's a good counterpuncher, he has tremendous velocity, and what we didn't know until the Campbell fight is that he's a fighter with a lot of balls – big balls. Criticism will always exist, but Campbell was an Olympic champion who's fought against some of the best fighters in the world.

"We can work a lot on Ryan's defense, on his combination punching, and we can make him [more selective] when it comes to exchanging. Ryan is learning the ropes, but we're also working on his temperament so that he stays focused during a fight. That will only come with experience, and I think in one year he'll be one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world."

"Just being around Canelo and Eddy, if you're not ignorant, you'll become a better fighter," offered Garcia. "I'm the type of person, once I get a grasp of something, I'll take it to another level. I love what Eddy and Canelo are doing for me, and I want to show people that if you're not ignorant, you will learn from the best. The moment you think that you know it all is the moment you don't

"I'M GONNA TRAIN MY ASS OFF SO THAT WHEN YOU STEP IN THAT RING WITH ME, YOU'RE IN A FREDDY KRUEGER DREAM."

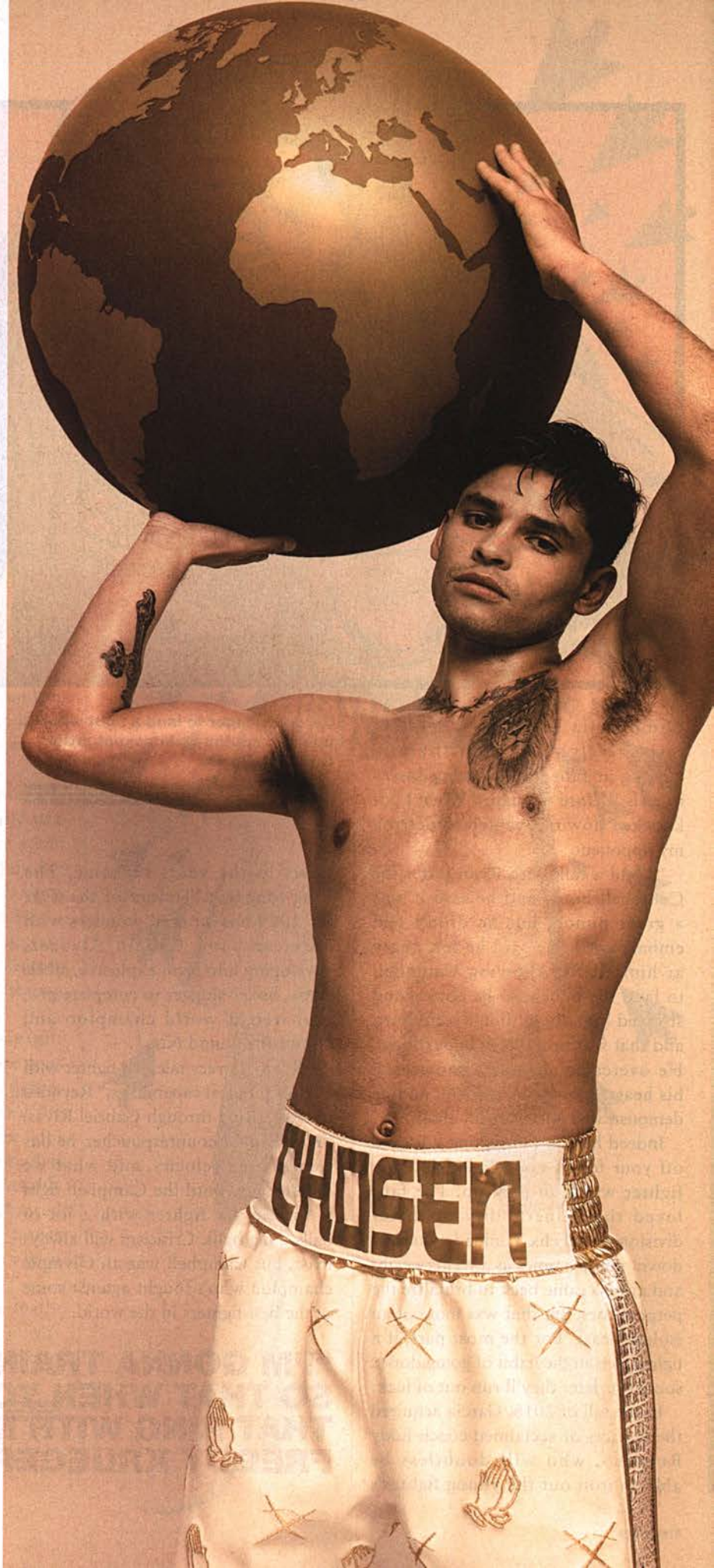
know anything.

"Where am I gonna be at 23, 24 years old? You guys just gotta see. Will it be scary? Yes. Will it be a nightmare to be in the ring with me? Most definitely. No matter what an opponent does, I'm gonna be a nightmare, because I'm gonna work hard to make sure it's a nightmare. I'm not gonna take any chances. I'm gonna train my ass off so that when you step in that ring with me, you're in a Freddy Krueger dream."

One, two, Ryan is coming for you ...

What fans are dreaming of is the possibility of tantalizing matchups involving Garcia, Teofimo Lopez, Gervonta Davis and Devin Haney. The lightweight division is one of the deepest in boxing, and there are those who view this multi-talented quartet as a possible reincarnation of the legendary Four Kings. You remember that era, right? Back in the day when superfights were relatively easy to put together. Between November 1979 and September 1981, Sugar Ray Leonard fought Wilfred Benitez (for many fans the fifth king), Roberto Duran (twice) and Thomas Hearns (Marvelous Marvin Hagler would come later). If you jump forward a couple of eras, De La Hoya enjoyed the company of Pernell Whitaker, Ike Quartey and Trinidad, all within two-and-a-half years.

Nowadays, however, making matchups of that quality for a big-name fighter is a far more arduous and complex process. Ego and money get in the way – they always have – but never has promotional allegiance and network affiliation been a more consistent and frustrating problem. And that is crippling the sport. Just as Floyd Mayweather Jr. versus Manny Pacquiao happened five or six years too late, Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford are likely to have grandchildren before they share a



He may be carrying the weight of huge expectations, but "KingRy" is relishing the challenge.

prize ring.

"Yes, it is difficult nowadays to make these big fights happen, because of certain situations with promoters, managers ... even with the fighters themselves," opined De La Hoya. "Obviously, back in the day, if a fight was there to be made, it happened because the fighters wanted to fight and the promoters had no problem putting it together. Nowadays there are a lot of fighters thinking too much about the money and not about the glory. Instead of thinking about their legacy, they're thinking about how much money they're going to make. I tell fighters not to worry about that. Worry about getting the biggest fights, the toughest fights, build your legacy, and the money will come."

De La Hoya was in no way taking aim at Garcia, because he knows only too well that legacy is at the forefront with this burgeoning young superstar. Garcia made it crystal clear during our conversation that his dance card for 2021 must include Pacquiao, who represents a significant step up in class and – being that the eight-division titleholder currently operates at 147 pounds – weight. In late January, Garcia released a mock-up fight poster on his official Instagram page, suggesting that the fight was a reality. Then things got a little murky. Eric Gomez, president of Golden Boy Promotions, went on record as saying that the fight "isn't going to happen," and Garcia's advisers countered by saying that talks were still ongoing. If that's not confusing enough, there were rumors that it would be an exhibition bout.

"The reason there was exhibition talk is because Manny had offers from other people to do exhibitions," confirmed Garcia. "But things change. I came into the picture. They contacted me and I let my people know that it's no exhibition with me. We're gonna have to do a real fight. I'm on the rise in my career. I'm not trying to have an exhibition; that's for when you're out of the game. Manny's obviously still in his career and beat Keith Thurman (in his last fight on July 20, 2019), so we're both ready to go. Manny loves it, I love it, and the reason I love it is because not only do I have a chance to share the ring with someone that I look up to, but I also get the chance to take the torch.

Garcia celebrates the Campbell triumph with coach Eddy Reynoso.

"A lot of people don't want the fight to happen, because after that there is no question that I'm the person that gets to make the moves the way I want to make the moves. It's not just about being in control, it's about what's fair. When you're in control, you have the opportunity to do what's fair, and I know that I can be trusted with that. I will fight the fights that I need to fight, and I will milk every ounce of greatness [out of myself]. I will fight the fights for the fans and for the people."

Now, if making a Pacquiao bout is as hard as a De La Hoya left hook, then making a fight with Garcia's second choice of opponent might be as hard as an Earnie Shavers right hand. Following the career-best triumph over Campbell, Garcia proactively addressed the crowd in attendance, asking them specifically who they wanted him to face next. The overwhelming choice was Gervonta Davis, so Campbell called out the unbeaten WBA junior lightweight titleholder, who also campaigns at 135 pounds, in the days and weeks that followed. It's an amazing matchup – unmissable – but the pathway to making this one is a minefield.

Davis is promoted by Premier Boxing Champions, an organization that isn't in the habit of working with Golden Boy Promotions. For the most part, some would say that PBC is only in the habit of working with PBC. However, it's difficult to overstate the venom that exists between these two entities. There was the $300 million lawsuit that Golden Boy Promotions filed in 2015, which alleged that PBC violated antitrust laws and the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform act by monopolizing the sport. A federal judge dismissed that suit in January 2017.

With that in mind, why is Garcia so confident that a fight with "Tank" Davis can happen in the short term?

"I'm confident because where there's a will, there's a way," he said sternly. "When I want something, I go all in for it, and I don't let people get in the way. I will stand up for what's right. People gotta stop getting it twisted. The promoters work for the fighters; the fighters don't work for the promoters. I would straight up tell someone if they're not doing the right things because of their own agendas. And I don't care about the repercussions, because I'm standing up for what's true. The truth is better than gold; it's better than silver. I'm confident that the Tank Davis fight can happen because I know myself."

De La Hoya has been a promoter for longer than he was a professional fighter, so he knows how to play the game with the media. The Hall of Famer insists that both matchups are realistic, and he also acknowledged that a Pacquiao showdown presents a strong case of history moving in cycles.

"I would love to make [the Pacquiao] fight one day," said De La Hoya, who surrendered his superstar torch to the Filipino icon in the final fight of his illustrious career in December 2008. "Ryan believes in his abilities, and I don't blame him. The Pacquiao fight could be Ryan's destiny, the fight that takes him to superstardom. First things first, though. We have to sit down with Manny Pacquiao's people, and if it's real, then we can discuss terms. I don't know any specifics, but I've heard [on the grapevine] that Pacquiao has a fight scheduled later this year. And I've also heard that he's going to be running for president [of the Philippines].

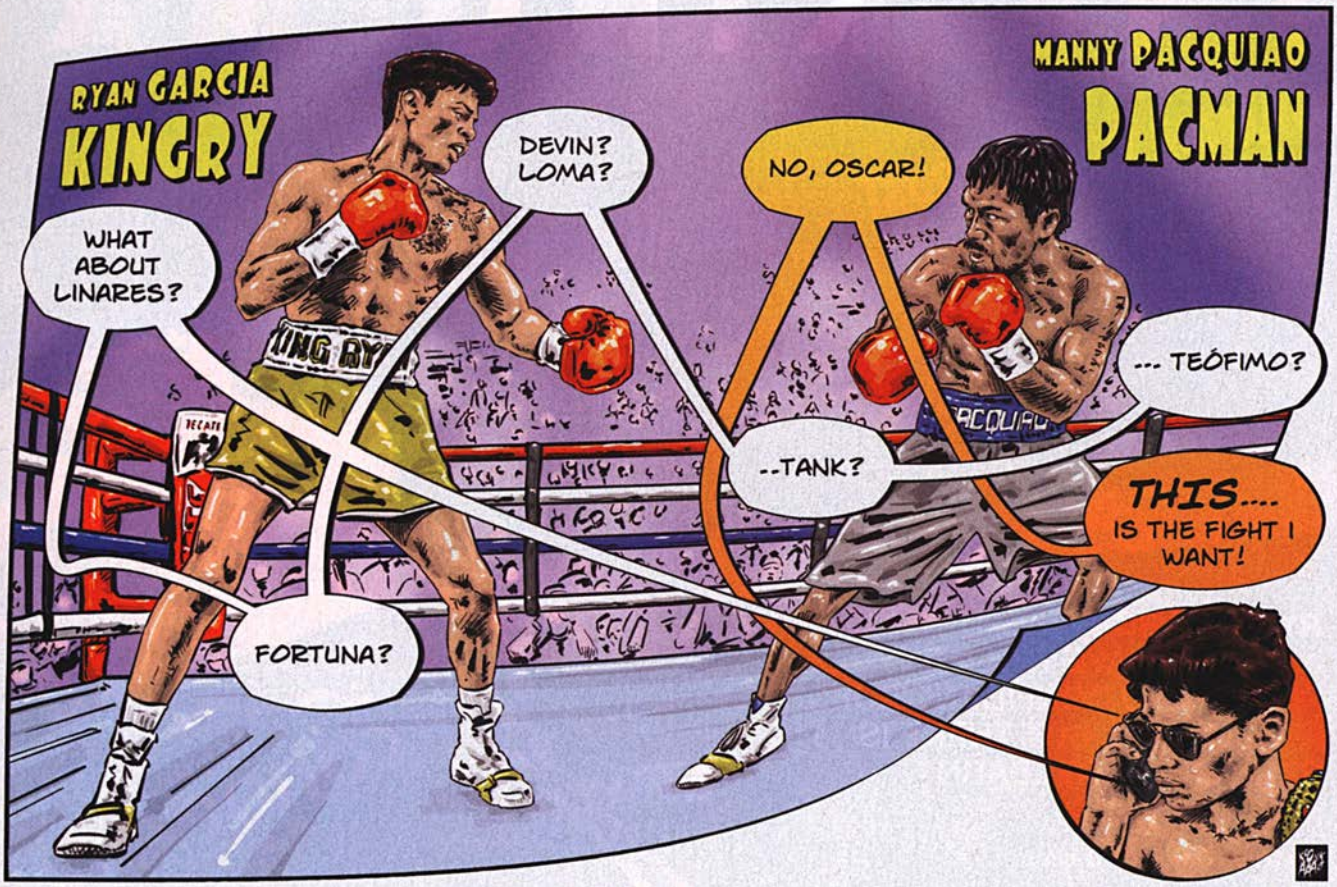
"WHEN I WANT SOMETHING, I GO ALL IN FOR IT, AND I DON'T LET PEOPLE GET IN THE WAY."

"If a fight like Tank Davis and Ryan Garcia can be made, we're the first ones to run to the negotiation table and make it happen. Any fight is possible; any fight is doable. We've shown in the past that we can work with any promoter, any fighter, any network. Obviously we're with DAZN, but we're willing to make any fight happen for the sake of the sport, and that's the bottom line. We never want to keep fighters from getting the big fights that they want. I would sit down with PBC, no problem whatsoever, because we believe in getting the best fights for our fighters."

Promoter rhetoric or honest self-expression? How realistic is it that Golden Boy and PBC make it to the negotiation table? Some critics would suggest there's more chance of catching a brick in a cobweb, but let's keep an open mind for a second. What if Garcia was to have his wish list granted? What does his trainer think of prospective showdowns against Pacquiao and Davis?

"He's ready for any of these fighters," Reynoso stated before erring on the side of caution. "What we need is a little bit more experience, but he's ready to compete with any of them. Why do I say more experience? He's only 22 years old. He's only started fighting boxers at the level of a Luke Campbell, so we're gonna need more work. But I think he's ready for any

Oscar De La Hoya sought out the greatest challenges as a fighter and can identify with Garcia.



of these fights.

"Both the Pacquiao and Davis fights are very complicated, more so Pacquiao because he's such an experienced southpaw. He's been knocked out, came back from it and continued on with his career. Gervonta Davis is also a dangerous fight, but I'd like it if we fought him first, because he's in [Ryan's] weight class. Ryan wouldn't be giving up as much of an advantage. I'd really like it if he fought Tank [first]."

So, the promoter insists that he's willing to walk across to the other side of the street, or at least meet halfway. We'll see what comes of that. The trainer would like to nurture his fighter's state-of-the art weaponry and add to what is already a formidable skillset. That's understandable. Ryan Garcia, however, wants to take on the best fighters in the world, and he doesn't want to wait around. There may be some testy conversations in the near future, and judging by Garcia's philosophy on modern-day boxing,

Garcia has his own short list, but the options for future opposition are many and varied.

in terms of what matters and what doesn't, he's always going to be a handful outside of the ring as well as inside it.

"World title belts mean nothing," Garcia insists. "People could get mad about it, people could get angry, but the only reason I wear a belt is because it looks good. Belts do not matter. If they say someone is the champ, I'm cool with that. I'm humble enough to say, 'OK, he's the champ!' But guess what? I'm gonna go take that! At the end of the day, it's about fighting the best. It's about giving the fans what they want to see.

"Look at mandatories. With mandatories, what you need to ask yourself is, 'What did this guy do to get [in the mandatory position]? Who did he fight?' If he's deserving and fought motherfuckers to get there, then let's go. But anyone can get in a mandatory position now. Anyone! What I'm saying is, if you didn't fight someone to earn that spot, then I'm going after a bigger fight. And then guys use it as an excuse, like a pawn: 'Oh, I don't want to fight that dude; he's tough as fuck. I'm gonna fight my mandatory.' That's the bullshit in boxing."

Garcia has absolutely no intention of resting on his laurels and playing it safe. He's unique, ambitious and fearless. Intent on changing the face of the sport, this loquacious young lightweight certainly has all the tools to become a transcendent figure. What's more, Ryan Garcia is absolutely obsessed with delivering where it matters most. And anyone willing to prove that he's merely a social media creation will have to do it the hard way.

Tom Gray is Managing Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

THE KING MAKES THE CROWN

RYAN GARCIA MIGHT ALREADY HAVE THE SHINY PROPS AND CONFIDENCE OF A MONARCH, BUT THERE IS STILL MUCH TO LEARN

Photos by **Sye Williams**

Words by **Gareth A Davies**

"Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them. Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain, but for the heart to conquer it." So wrote the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

It applies aptly to Ryan Garcia. The most impressive aspect to Garcia's brutal ending of Luke Campbell was not the body-shot finish on a night of coronation for the young lightweight star, but the intent manner in which he suddenly stopped his celebrations of victory to listen to Canelo Alvarez in his ear. Canelo, Garcia told me a few days later, had been chastizing the victor of his mistakes in the fight, for

Ryan Garcia went down for the first time in his career, but Olympic champion Luke Campbell was the one who would stay down.

leaving himself open to the counter as he attacked his foe. Canelo, like many of us, saw the vulnerability Garcia will have while taking on Teofimo Lopez, Devin Haney, Gervonta Davis and the phalanx of talent in the potentially thrilling 135-pound division. Being dropped by Campbell in the fight signaled the pitfalls for the pugilist, that his lack of wariness could leave him open to the power of his rivals. Garcia had taken the words of Canelo, his quasi-mentor, to heart.

Garcia may not be the best in the division, or the most complete, but in truth he is the golden goose for the others, the one who has become the star in the mainstream. Garcia has a reach beyond the others, beyond pure boxing skills, a reach that has encouraged the fascination of more than eight million Instagram followers, craning their necks, enthralled with Garcia's life and sojourn in the sport. It was a bold move to enter the arena on a throne – a gamble. But it was a risk that paid off. The kid with the choirboy looks has a transformational movement about him, from his life outside the ring to his performance inside it. Why does he fight? How did Garcia discover that he had the equalizer in his hands?

ABOVE: Garcia was facing his biggest challenge yet in the gold medalist from Britain.

TOP RIGHT: Anyone choosing to enter the arena on a throne better be planning to give a memorable performance.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The recklessness and vulnerability of youth were evident when Garcia was floored by Campbell, but the following moments showed that he has the maturity and the cojones to stay calm and stand strong.

"I definitely had to search in myself spiritually and in my soul," he told me with an endearing honesty. "Naturally I'm not really an aggressive person; I'm not a confrontational person. But the more I gained experience in the ring, I didn't know I had this in me. When I get in the ring, I do switch up. I change into a different person. All that comes out in the ring, and it's been a journey – a long journey – to figure out who I really am.

"When I get in the ring, that's

GARCIA
GARCIA
GARCIA

Eisenberg America's Gourmet Beef Hot Dog
MODIA MODIA MODIA
Hennessy
GOLDEN BOY
Hennessy

GARCIA vs CAMPBELL

Hennessy
Never stop. Never settle.

why I love boxing, because I get to be who I am deep inside." It is an alter-ego, perhaps?

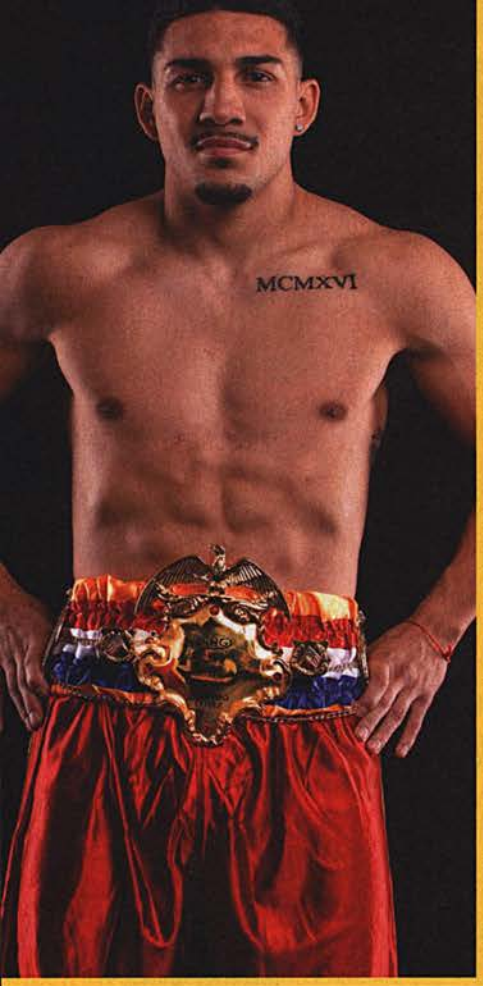
"In a way it is," affirms Garcia. "Outside the ring, I'm so happy and charismatic, but when I'm in the ring, I have a different zone. I go into it and I'm not thinking of anything. I'm an overthinker outside the ring, but when I go in there, there's no overthinking. I just love it and do it. I get to be myself, and I love it. I can't explain it. It's where I'm supposed to be. The idea of being in the world is cool, but being in the ring is where I get to be who I am."

As a result, that dichotomy as a person draws the masses. "A lot of people can't just watch boxing; they need something to it. They need a storyline. Is there a good guy? A bad guy? Is there a young, up-and-coming, charismatic kid like me? They either love me or hate me. That's what people love. They don't want to watch two fighters – I mean the boxing fans do, but I'm talking about casual fans. They want to tune in and see a buildup. They want to know who the person is and their story. Me, they see me as a young rock star, knocking people out, and some people want to root for me and some people don't like me because I'm cocky and arrogant. In reality, I'm not. But when I'm in the ring, I do hold that ego or arrogance. It's not, like, intentional. It's just a simple thing. You can't go into a fight just trying to box him. In my mind, I know he's trying to knock me out and I'm trying to knock him out, so we can't really be friends here."

TOP LEFT: Garcia wears the crown, but he defers to a higher authority in pound-for-pound king Canelo Alvarez when it comes to boxing knowledge.

BOTTOM LEFT: There was a genuine sense of sportsmanship and respect from both Garcia and Campbell after the fight.

RIGHT: Garcia faces a future with massive rewards if he can overcome the challenges ahead.



AND THE BEST LIGHTWEIGHT IN THE WORLD IS?

AN ESTEEMED PANEL OF 40 BOXING EXPERTS PREDICTS THE OUTCOME OF A 135-POUND BATTLE ROYALE

By **Thomas Hauser**

Clockwise from top left: Teofimo Lopez, Gervonta Davis, Ryan Garcia and Devin Haney.

During the past nine years, I've administered polls in various weight divisions. The concept behind these polls is to take the best fighters in a weight class and ask what would happen if they fought each other in a round-robin tournament. A panel of boxing experts then predicts the results of each hypothetical fight, with one point being awarded for each predicted win and a half point for each matchup that's deemed "too close to call." The process is about what would happen if the fights were held now, not what the fighters accomplished two years ago or what they might do two years in the future.

Using this format, The Ring now turns its attention to what could become boxing's most entertaining division – the lightweights.

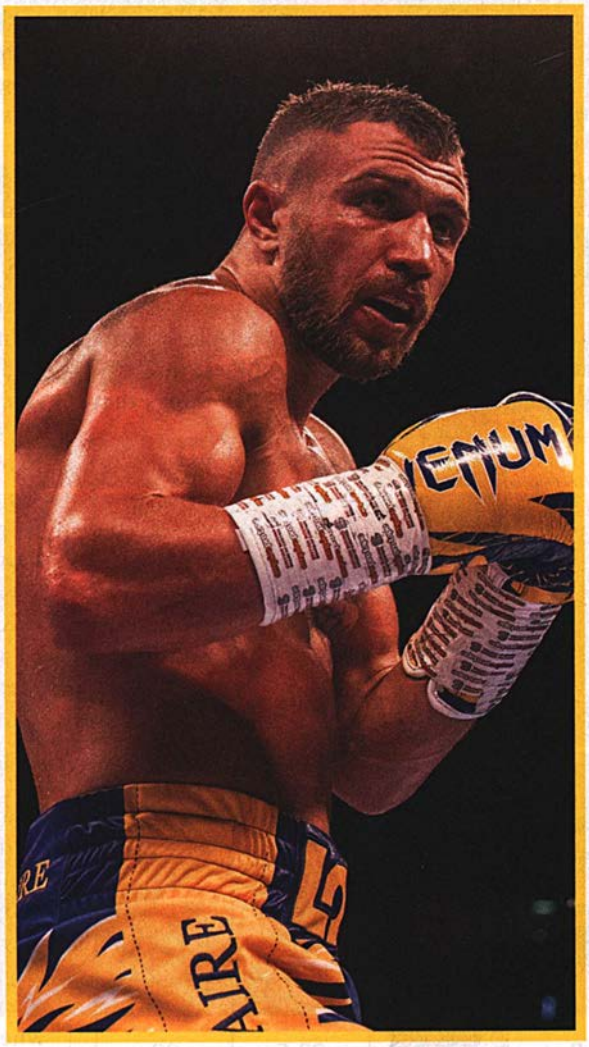
During the past year, the prospect of mixing and matching among the five best lightweights in the world has captured the imagination. Listed alphabetically, they are Gervonta Davis (24-0, 23 KOs), Ryan Garcia (21-0, 18 KOs), Devin Haney (25-0, 15 KOs), Vasiliy Lomachenko (14-2, 10 KOs), and Teofimo Lopez (16-0, 12 KOs).

Four of the five – Davis (age 26), Lopez (23), Garcia (22), and Haney (22) – are at a point in their respective careers where they're getting better. Lomachenko (33) has been to the mountaintop and appears to be on a downward slide.

There was a time when a father training his son was taboo in boxing. Here, each of the fighters except Davis has been trained by his father, although Henry Garcia recently ceded the role of lead trainer for his son to Eddy Reynoso.

Lopez currently has more belts than the other fighters on this list. But we're in an age when any good fighter can be maneuvered to a belt. The more pressing question is, "Which of these fighters deserves to be ranked No. 1, and where do the others fall in line?"

I should add that Garcia has a huge social media following that the other four might envy for marketing purposes. As of this writing, these numbers are:



Despite the points loss to Lopez, Vasiliy Lomachenko poses a threat to any 135-pounder.

Instagram followers: Garcia (8.4 million), Davis (2.7 million), Lomachenko (1.9 million), Haney (922,000), Lopez (502,000).

Twitter followers: Garcia (515,200), Davis (330,000), Lomachenko (188,000), Haney (91,000), Lopez (89,000). *[Editor's note: Garcia closed his Twitter account in late January.]*

But stating the obvious, Ryan's 8.4 million Instagram followers can't fight for him once the bell for Round 1 rings.

If these five fighters fought each other in a round-robin tournament, there would be a total of 10 fights. One of these fights (Lomachenko vs. Lopez) has already taken place. So we're looking here at a rematch.

Forty experts who bring differing perspectives to their roles in boxing participated in the poll. They were former fighters Timothy Bradley, Matthew Macklin, Sergio Mora and Gerry Cooney; matchmakers Bruce Trampler, Eric Bottjer, Ron Katz and Mike Marchionte; trainers Russ Anber and Pat Burns; promoters Lou DiBella, Don Elbaum, Russell Peltz and Artie Pelullo; manager Keith Connolly; ring announcers Michael Buffer and David Diamante; historians Adam Pollack and Craig Hamilton; and a cross section of the media including Al Bernstein, Gareth A. Davies, Bart Barry, Brin-Jonathan Butler, Matt Christie, Tris Dixon, Bernard Fernandez, Norm Frauenheim, Tom Gerbasi, Randy Gordon, Keith Idec, Don McRae, Lance Pugmire, Dan Rafael, Rick Reeno, Michael Rosenthal, Joe Santoliquito, Rob Tebbutt, Mark Kriegel, Brian Kenny and Doug Fischer.

These 40 electors made a total of 400 predictions regarding the outcome of all 10 fights. A perfect score would have been 160 points (all 40 electors picking the same fighter to win each of his four fights). I wasn't one of the electors. I administered the poll; that's all.

Teofimo Lopez was a runaway choice for the No. 1 ranking. The point totals are:

Twenty-six of the 40 electors thought that Lopez would win all four

AND THE BEST LIGHTWEIGHT IN THE WORLD IS?

TEOFIMO LOPEZ ..... 140.5 POINTS
VASILIY LOMACHENKO ..... 90.5 POINTS
GERVONTA DAVIS ..... 78.5 POINTS
DEVIN HANEY ..... 51.5 POINTS
RYAN GARCIA ..... 39 POINTS

of his fights. Three thought that Haney would win all four. One elector each picked Lomachenko and Davis to run the table.

As an aside, I should note that the four former fighters participating in the poll were at odds with the consensus. They ranked Lopez first, followed by Haney, Davis, Lomachenko and Garcia, in that order.

A breakdown of the electors' predictions on a fighter vs. fighter basis can be seen in the accompanying chart.

Many of the electors included observations with their predictions. Among their comments were, "I love these matchups – all of them ... These are very good fighters with aggressive, crowd-pleasing styles that would fit together to make exciting fights ... Most of these guys haven't been tested yet the way I'd like to see them tested. There are so many unanswered questions, especially about Haney, Davis and Garcia ... It all depends on how they perform under pressure in a big fight. And if there's a crowd, that could make a difference too ... All of these guys can whack. That's one of the things that makes these fights so exciting. Any one of these guys can turn everything around with one punch and trash all of our predictions."

Other thoughts included:

"Teofimo is riding high right now. And his size gives him an edge ... One fight can change so much. Before Lomachenko-Lopez, most of us were picking Lomachenko to win. It's all different now ... Teofimo might not be as good as we think he is. Or maybe he's better."

★★★

"The sand is running through the hourglass for Lomachenko. His body is starting to betray him ... People talked about Loma like he was some kind of wizard. But the wizard's wand is losing its magic ... The wear and tear of all those amateur fights is catching up with Lomachenko. He's more vulnerable to injury now than he was before. And his reflexes are slowing ... Get real. Lomachenko hasn't looked like a superstar since he moved up to 135 pounds. He's too small for these guys, and they hit too hard for him ... Loma has enough left to win these fights. I think Lopez just caught him on the right night."

★★★

"Gervonta has impressive power. But his resume has been built against smaller, aging fighters like Leo Santa Cruz and Yuriorkis Gamboa ... Tank is a better fighter than a lot of people give him credit for. But he's lazy ... As good as Gervonta is, these guys are better ... Gervonta is the whole package. The big question is whether he can stay on track. If he does, look out."

★★★

"Haney has a style that's tough to beat. It's hard to find a fight where he lost a round on all three judges' scorecards ... Devin hasn't progressed as much in his last two fights (against Alfredo Santiago and Gamboa) as I would have liked to see him progress ... Haney has the highest ring IQ in the group, except for Lomachenko. In a lot of ways, he reminds me of Mayweather."

★★★

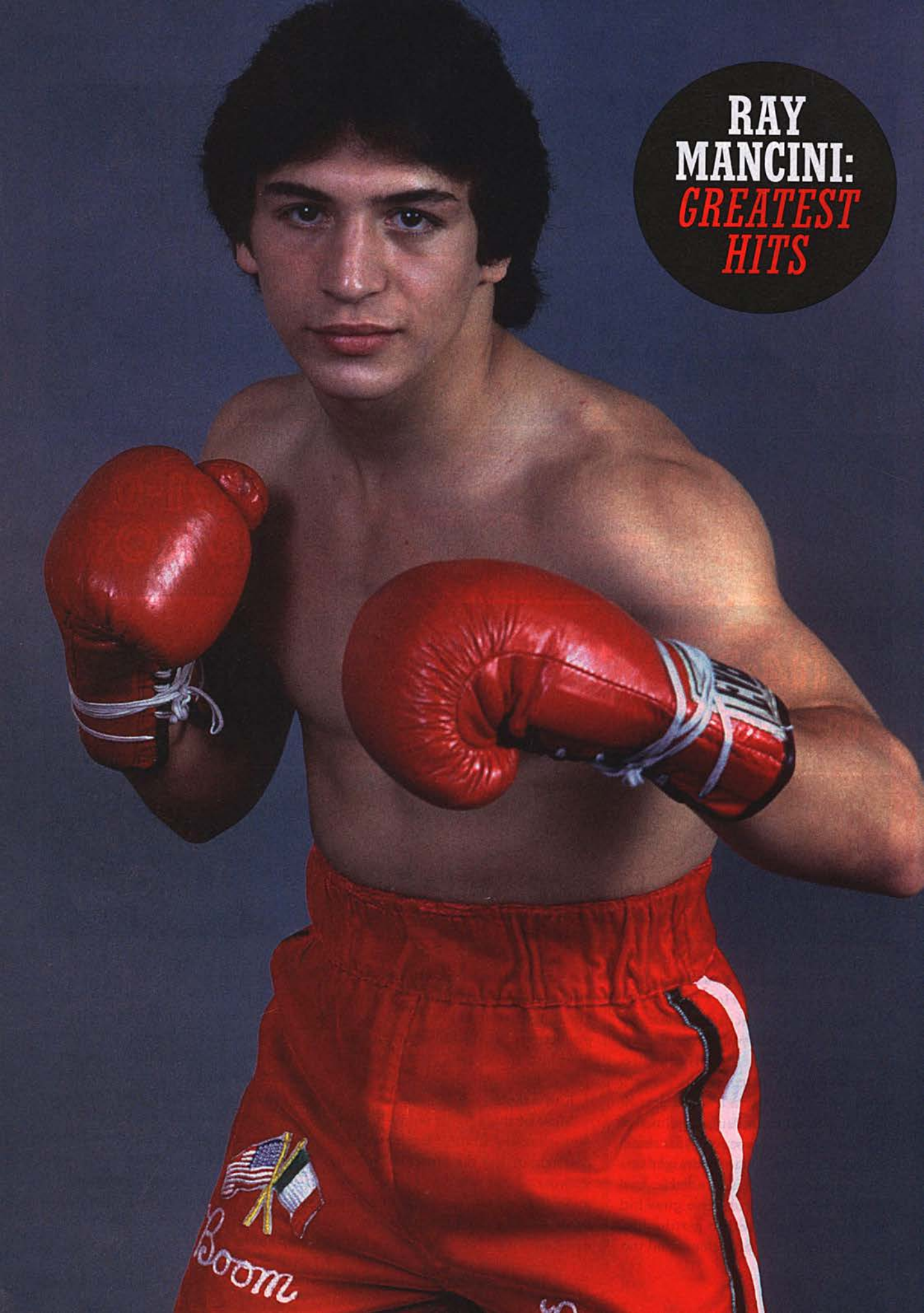
Name Points Record	vs. Teofimo Lopez	vs. Vasiliy Lomachenko	vs. Gervonta Davis	vs. Devin Haney	vs. Ryan Garcia
Teofimo Lopez 140.5 Pts 137-16-7		33	35	32.5	40
Vasiliy Lomachenko 90.5 points 87-66-7	7		22	30.5	31
Gervonta Davis 78.5 points 74-77-9	5	18		23.5	32
Devin Haney 51.5 points 48-105-7	7.5	9.5	16.5		18
Ryan Garcia 39 points 37-119-4	0	9	8	22	

"Promoters dream about having a fighter like Garcia. He's incredibly marketable. He's exciting to watch. The question is whether Eddy Reynoso can take him to an elite level ... Ryan is fast. He has power. He's exciting to watch. He's a real fighter with a Logan Paul social media following. But he's not ready for these guys yet ... Garcia stands straight up. He doesn't move his head. He has defensive lapses. And these guys hit harder than he's used to getting hit. He has to work on his defense and the rest of his game to go with his power ... I like Ryan as a fighter. I love his gunslinger style. Then I look at my predictions for this tournament and I have him at 0-and-4."

And a thought in closing ...

Most of these fights won't happen. And that's a shame. Each of these five fighters has the potential for ring greatness. But we don't know how good they are and how good they can be. I hope they fight each other so we can find out.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.


RAY
MANCINI:
GREATEST
HITS
Boom

A POP-CULTURE PHENOM BEFORE THE DAYS OF SOCIAL MEDIA, **RAY "BOOM BOOM" MANCINI** WAS A HOMETOWN HERO WHO FOUGHT HIS WAY TO A WORLD TITLE

By **Anson Wainwright**

It's no coincidence that Ray Mancini was selected for this month's Greatest Hits. The former lightweight titleholder's rapid rise to prominence is reminiscent of our May cover star. Like Ryan Garcia, Mancini cracked the 135-pound rankings and attracted attention from the boxing world and casual fans while still a teenager, and like the social media sensation, he proved there was substance behind his publicity and popularity by defeating a legitimate contender. However, in Mancini's case, he defeated two, Jorge Morales and Jose Luis Ramirez, in nationally televised bouts that preceded his first shot at a world title.

Mancini was a "media darling" when that meant being a favorite of newspaper sportswriters and a regular on network television, where he drew strong ratings on *CBS Sports Saturday* broadcasts even before he challenged Alexis Arguello at age 20 in 1981. Mancini fell short against the Nicaraguan great, but his gutsy effort and humility in defeat garnered a legion of new fans. However, before world title shots and the TV spotlight, there was Mancini's hometown of Youngstown, Ohio, which supported him from the beginning.

"Growing up in Youngstown in the '60s was a great life," Mancini told The Ring. "Steel mills were booming; it was like a Pollyanna life. Playing in the streets, you didn't have to worry about locking the doors. It was a very simple life."

His father, Lenny, was a world-class lightweight who became the No. 1 contender in 1941 but wasn't able to fight for the title due to his service in World War II.

"When I was 7, 8 years old, I used to sneak down and read my father's scrapbooks," Mancini recalled. "I knew his career better than he knew his career."

Mancini became fascinated with boxing and wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, but the former pro tried to steer him in a different direction.

"I had academic as well as athletic scholarships to go to college," Mancini said. "I had a professional baseball offer. I had other opportunities, and [my father] wanted me to pursue them. He said, 'Raymond, it was the Depression – I had to eat; I had to fight. You don't. I told him, 'I want to win the world title for you.' So what's he gonna say? It worked out. I'm fortunate; I was able to fulfil a dream, mine for him."

Mancini was a good amateur; he won three consecutive Northeastern Ohio Golden Gloves titles (1977-1979) and reached the semifinal of the 1978 National Golden Gloves tournament.

The following year, Mancini caught the eye of professional boxing trainer Murphy Griffith, the uncle of the great Emile Griffith.

"I'll never forget when I lost a fight in the 1979 Golden Gloves in the quarterfinals," said Mancini, who compiled a 43-7 amateur record. "I was so heartbroken; I had truly felt I won the fight. I was in the locker room and Murphy Griffith walked in and said to me, 'Young man, what are your goals?' and I said, 'I'm never gonna fight another amateur fight. I'm looking to turn pro.' He said, 'You ain't never gonna win the national title, but you could be a very good pro. You could win the world title, and I could help you get there."

Griffith linked Mancini and renowned manager Dave Wolf, and the trio began working together.

"I had my pro debut in [Struthers, Ohio, in] October of '79," said Mancini. "Then Dave put me on the road; the second fight was in Phoenix. My third fight was in Washington [D.C.]. My fourth fight was in Dallas. He would bounce me around the country. He got me recognized because I was fighting around the country. Dave was a master at moving guys and making the right move.

"Murphy Griffith, who taught me the pro game, said, 'I'm not going to change a lot; I'm just going to refine you.' He did a great job. 'Griff' took me from a rugged, raw banger from the amateurs, he helped me develop the jab, which became a critical part of my career."

Mancini moved quickly, advancing to 19-0 (15 KOs) when he stopped Morales to win the NABF title in 1981. He then employed his boxing skills to good effect against Ramirez, a future two-time WBC titleholder, winning a unanimous decision.

That victory earned him a shot at three-division titleholder Alexis Arguello in October 1981. Although Mancini lost by 14th-round stoppage, it was an invaluable learning experience.

Just seven months and three fights later, he was matched with WBA titleholder Arturo Frias in Las Vegas. The pride of Youngstown impressively stopped Frias in a wild opening-round shootout.

Such was his popularity at the time that he was invited to meet the head of state.

"I had a chance to meet President Reagan in 1984," he said proudly. "I went to the White House; our local congressman set it up. For a kid who comes from the south side of Youngstown, Ohio, that's pretty special."

And it was in his hometown where he was especially revered.

"I was fortunate to have a great fan base," he said. "The people of Youngstown were a large part of my success, because they carried me a lot further than my body wanted to go.

The super-popular Mancini was the WBA lightweight titleholder for over two years.

So I'm always grateful to the people of Youngstown for their support."

Then came his second title defense, when he stopped South Korea's Duk Koo Kim in 14 ill-fated rounds. Tragically, Kim passed away five days later.

"After the Kim fight, I had no love for the game anymore," said Mancini. "[I would] fight as often as I could, make my money and get out. It became a business for me."

Mancini had his eye on life after boxing and moved to California in June 1985 following back-to-back losses to Livingstone Bramble. He got involved in acting, taking on roles in television and some films, but he didn't close the door on boxing. Although semi-retired, Mancini was still in search of a superfight and he found one vs. the eccentric but sublimely talented Hector Camacho in 1989.

"I already had the Camacho fight set [while still champion], but then the WBA said, 'You've got to fight Bramble or we're gonna strip you of the title,'" he explained. "At that time, my manager said, 'We'll give Bramble step-aside money.' I said, 'No, no, I'll beat Bramble and then we'll go to Camacho. I don't want anybody to say I ducked Bramble.' That wasn't the smartest thing, was it? (Mancini was stopped in 14 rounds.) But that's how I thought. I just wanted to fight the best fighters."

Mancini walked away from boxing for four years after losing the rematch to Bramble via 15-round decision, but he got into excellent condition to challenge Camacho for the fledgling WBO's inaugural 140-pound title. Mancini pressed the undefeated southpaw to the limit but lost a 12-round split decision. He fought once more, returning in 1992 to face Greg Haugen, who stopped him in seven rounds.

Mancini, who retired with a record of 29-5 (23 knockouts), continued his Hollywood life.

"[I was] seduced by the lifestyle. You see the sun 300-plus days of the year," he said. "I was making inroads into the entertainment business. I was enjoying being out there. I came home a couple times a year. I loved Youngstown; I never completely left Youngstown – my heart never left."

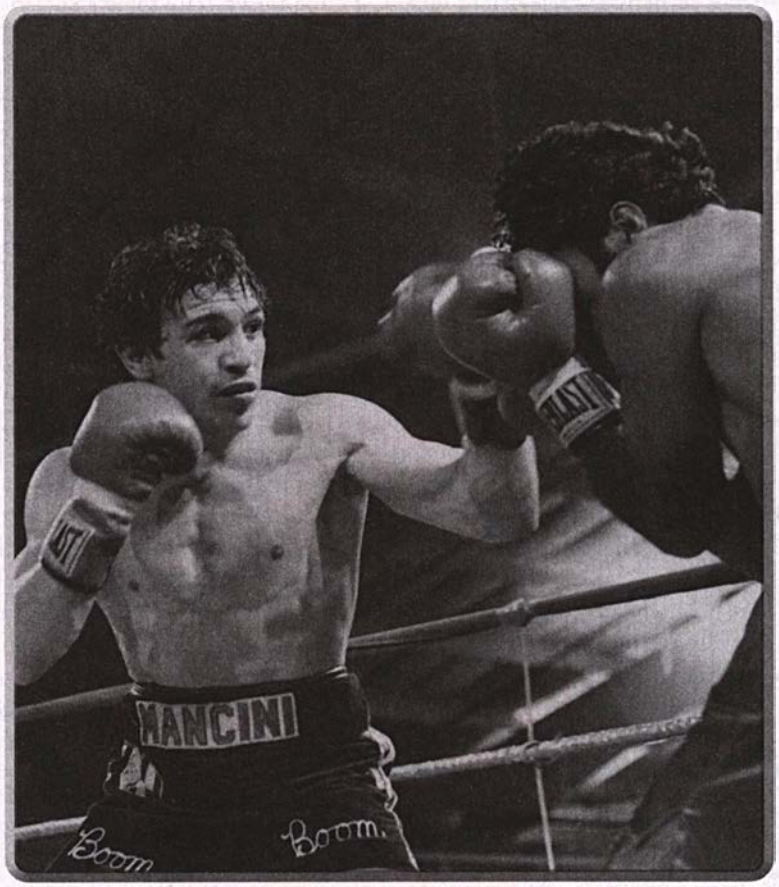
After living out west for 30 years, Mancini returned to his hometown. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2015. Now 59, he is producing films and is in talks with Netflix about a crime drama series based in Youngstown, described as The Sopranos meets Saturday Night Fever.

He also owns a wine company called Southpaw, a whiskey brand called Boom Boom Bourbon and a cigar business, Boom Boom El Campeon.

Here's what he had to say about seven of his most memorable nights in the ring:

JORGE MORALES

May 16, 1981, Concord Resort Hotel, Kiamesha Lake, New York • Title: NABF lightweight



"I was nervous before every fight; people who say they weren't nervous are full of crap. You want to be nervous, because it keeps you sharp, on edge. The trick is you don't let the nerves overwhelm you. You've got to manage the nerves.

"He was the NABF champion and nobody wanted to fight him, because he was a dangerous opponent. A lot of guys were avoiding him. When we got offered an opportunity on ESPN – national television – every fight was a stepping stone. Styles make fights. Stylistically, he was made to order; he was in front of me. I felt strong. I had him baffled with my footwork. I was hitting him with a lot of shots. When I moved inside, I stayed there and pushed him to the ropes, and I loved to fight inside. Morales was a big win for me; it showcased my talent on a national stage."

RESULT: MANCINI TKO 9

JOSE LUIS RAMIREZ

July 19, 1981, Packard Music Hall, Warren, Ohio • Title: NABF lightweight

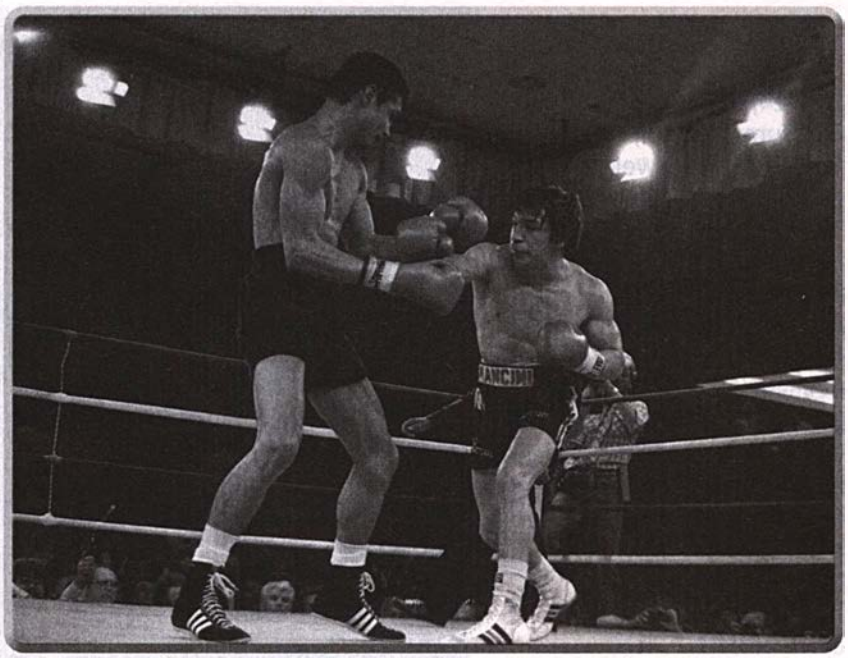
"Warren, Ohio, the next town over, became a second home to me. He was such a favorite that they didn't even take bets in Las Vegas. He had so much experience. He had [recently] fought Alexis Arguello in a non-title fight; he dropped Arguello twice and lost a split decision in Miami, which means he won the fight. Everyone thought I'd be a tune-up for him before he fought Arguello again.

"Stylewise, he was perfect for me; he was a southpaw and a good puncher. That's why he had no problem coming to Warren, Ohio, because he thought he was going to walk through me. We trained to fight a disciplined fight. The guy's going to bang with you, you box him; he wants to box you, you attack. This fight we changed it up. I was going to box him, and then when I had the opportunity to get inside, bang with him and then move out. I knew that would confuse him. I saw tapes, and he had problems with guys who moved a little bit. So that's what we did, and it worked to perfection. I think I shut him out all 12 rounds, though he was vastly more experienced than me. I shut him out because of the game plan, and I fought it to a T. Could I have stood there and banged with him? Yeah. Did I think I could beat him? Yeah. But then why? It makes things dangerous when you didn't have to. It was incredible. It was a great feeling, not only because I beat the No. 3 contender in the world, but because I knew that fight was going to launch me into a title fight against Arguello."

RESULT: MANCINI UD 12

ALEXIS ARGUELLO

October 3, 1981, Bally's Park Place Hotel Casino, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Title: WBC lightweight



"If it's 12 rounds, I win the title, because I was beating him after 12. The course of boxing history changes if it wasn't for 15 rounds. Joe Louis was behind until he stopped Billy Conn in the 13th round. Rocky Marciano was behind Jersey Joe Walcott going into the 13th round, when he caught Joe Walcott. Ray Leonard was way behind Tommy Hearns going into that 14th round. That's why the true championship distance is 15.

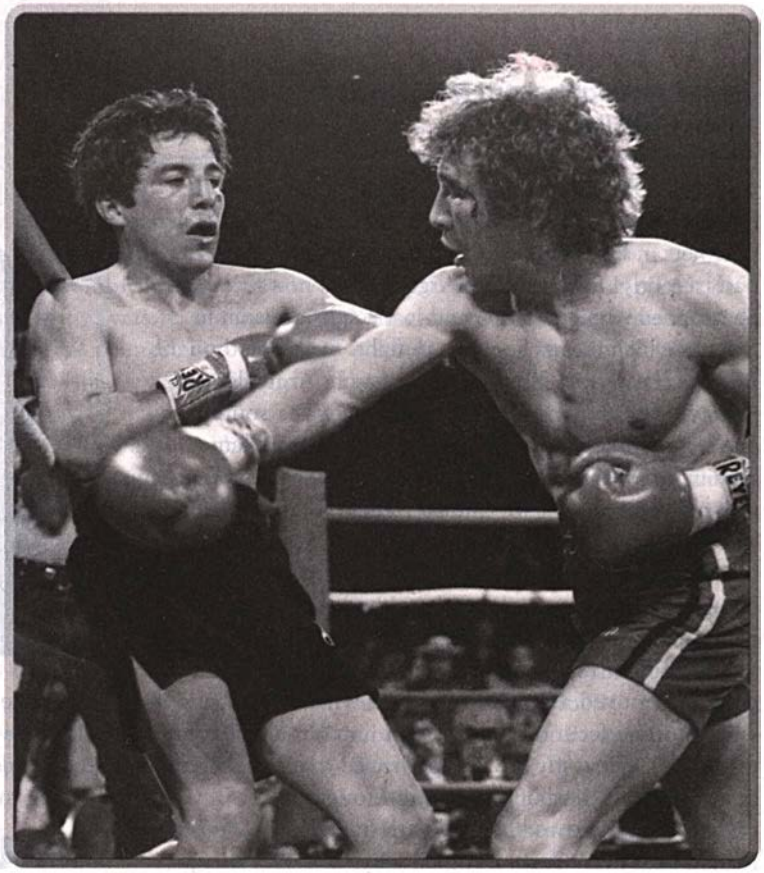
"Arguello felt if he could take me into the later rounds, he could use his experience, which is exactly what he did. I always say Alexis sets traps early in a fight and then he goes back later in the fight to get them traps caught. Early on, I had him backing up. I was in and out on him. I made him miss that right hand all night, but it only takes one. He started finding his distance later on. I was giving him more room, and finally he landed. That's experience: creating that distance where you don't smother your shots.

"He never lost his composure. You don't want to get ragged. It looks like he's the ring general; it works on the judge's mind. Keep your composure and with the fight plan, eventually you'll get him."

RESULT: ARGUELLO TKO 14

ARTURO FRIAS

May 8, 1982, The Aladdin, Las Vegas • Title: WBA lightweight



"Even though I fought Arguello in October, I had my next fight in December and then January. I came right back; I didn't let it get me down.

"It was a very difficult fight. I went out there and felt very confident; I was very relaxed. Art Frias was a helluva fighter. He caught me about 20 seconds into the fight, and I started to move back a bit. He jumped on me. My trainer, Murphy Griffith, taught me boxing is pretty basic: Either you're moving forward or back; you're punching or you're catching punches or you're making a guy miss. If you get hurt, you either cover or you fire back, and I chose to fire back. When you fire back on a guy, it breaks him up. When we fought in the center of the ring, I just happened to catch him with a double left hook near the end of the round. I was like a shark smelling blood and jumped on him and kept throwing punches in bunches until the referee stopped it."

RESULT: MANCINI TKO 1

ERNESTO ESPANA

July 24, 1982, Mollenkopf Stadium, Warren, Ohio • Title: WBA lightweight

"Espana was a former world champion; he was the mandatory defense. He fought Frias and it got stopped on a headbutt, and Art held on to the title with a technical decision. And they were going to fight a rematch, but I was ahead in the ratings and got the title shot, and [Espana] got the winner. So, after I beat Frias, Espana was the opponent. It was a hometown crowd.

"The steel mills shut down in 1977. At that time, unemployment was 28 percent; almost a third of people were out of work. Bob Arum (the event promoter) wanted to charge $100 ringside, $50 reserved, $25 general admission. I said, 'You can't do that. You have to cut everything in half.' He said, 'I can't make any money that way.' I said, 'You've got to, Bob. These people can't pay. We'll make it up in volume.' He said, 'If I lose money, you're paying; I'm taking it out of your purse.' I said take it out of my purse, but he didn't lose money.

"We filled it with over 20,000 people. It was the best. It was one of the greatest days of my life. People were cashing their unemployment checks, welfare checks so they could come to the fight. I'll always be appreciative for that. Bob Arum was so nervous because it was supposed to rain all week. We got up and it was sunshine and blue sky. It was a great event, one of the greatest days of my life."

RESULT: MANCINI TKO 6

ORLANDO ROMERO

September 15, 1983, Madison Square Garden, New York • Title: WBA lightweight

"It's the mecca of boxing. For every little leaguer, you dreamed of playing at Yankee Stadium; for every fighter, you dreamed of fighting at the Garden. That is the mecca of boxing, not Las Vegas. [Las Vegas is] more so now, but you still fight at the Garden. It's a great event. You want to fight there.

"He was a strong guy, but I was controlling the fight. [When] I came back to my corner after the eighth, I had a bad cut [from a punch], and the doctor said to the referee 'Give him one more round.' I knew I had to do something because the cut was bad. I don't know if [the referee] would've stopped it or not. If we finished the ninth, would he have said the same thing to me? Who knows? But thank God I didn't give him the opportunity to do so."

RESULT: MANCINI KO 9

BOBBY CHACON

January 14, 1984, Lawlor Events Center, Reno, Nevada • Title: WBA lightweight

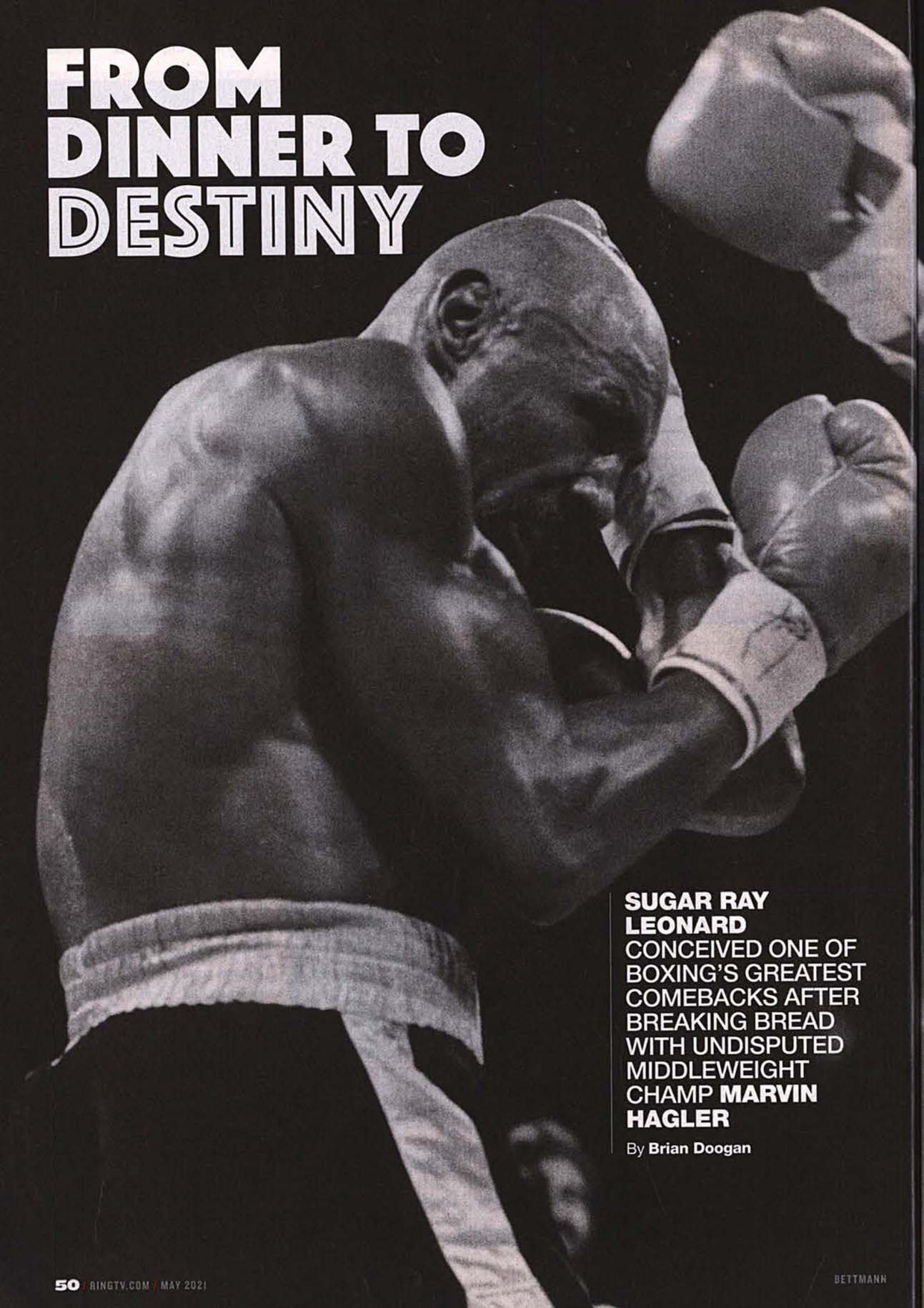
"Bobby was one of my heroes; I loved Bobby Chacon. We were friends. I trained in Los Angeles in 1980. I only had five fights [at the time]. We went out to Main Street Gym and Murphy Griffith, who lived in San Diego, said 'I'm going to get you all the sparring you need here.' I was having a hard time getting sparring in New York. Griff said 'We've got to see if you can fight.' I was knocking guys out and I got all the work I needed. The last day I was there, I met Bobby Chacon and he gave us two rounds; he was just playing with me. In '82, he was in the Fight of the Year (vs. Rafael Limon); '83 he was in the Fight of the Year (vs. Cornelius Boza-Edwards).

"I loved Bobby, but I knew I'd be too strong for him. I didn't want to take no chances. He was six years older and I had to make him fight at a young man's pace. Bobby liked to dictate the pace; he'd play around, shuck and jive, move, box you a little bit, and when he's ready to come at you, he'd attack. I wanted to keep the pressure on. I was going to make him fight at my pace. We did that and it worked perfect. Once I backed him up to the ropes, I wasn't letting him off. I kept him on the ropes – that's my game anyway. Though Bobby was a great counterpuncher and great inside fighter, I knew I was bigger and stronger. He was a great featherweight, junior lightweight; he wasn't a lightweight. I knew I wasn't getting the best [version] of Bobby; he was in the fourth quarter of his career. I beat him the way I should have."

RESULT: MANCINI TKO 3

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

FROM DINNER TO DESTINY



SUGAR RAY LEONARD CONCEIVED ONE OF BOXING'S GREATEST COMEBACKS AFTER BREAKING BREAD WITH UNDISPUTED MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMP **MARVIN HAGLER**

By **Brian Doogan**

BETTMANN

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brian Doogan is the former U.K. and European correspondent for The Ring. The England-based sportswriter was a regular contributor to the magazine for 20 years, 1990-2010. This article is an adapted excerpt combining passages of his book The SuperFight: Marvelous Marvin Hagler-Sugar Ray Leonard, available at book shops and on Amazon.com.

It was prior to a dinner show in Birmingham, England, in October 2005, when Ray Leonard supplied me with the details of an encounter he'd had with Marvin Hagler at a restaurant he co-owned in January 1986 that ultimately inspired my deep dive into the psychological drama at the heart of The SuperFight, staged at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas on April 6, 1987. Whether Leonard actually set out to trap Marvin is a moot point. The information he was able to mine that evening over dinner, coupled with the chinks he was able to detect in Marvin's armor during Hagler's tense, gripping battle with John Mugabi two months later, convinced Ray to issue his challenge. Marvin always saw this as a betrayal, and it placed him in the invidious position of either accepting Ray's challenge at a point in his career when deep down he no longer wanted to fight or potentially being viewed as having avoided the last man standing. Marvin would never countenance the notion of avoiding anyone, Ray Leonard most of all ...

FROM DINNER TO DESTINY

It was mid-January, early evening; a chill wind swept in off the Potomac River, foreboding a violent night. Halfway along Fairmont Avenue, off Old Georgetown Road in the heart of Bethesda, Maryland, an affluent, attractive suburb of Washington, D.C., two boxing legends sat down to dinner.

Marvelous Marvin Hagler, the undisputed world middleweight champion, undefeated and undaunted for a decade through 36 terrorizing fights, was accompanied by his wife, Bertha. He had been persuaded to fly in for the formal opening of Jameson's, a restaurant part-owned by the retired former world welterweight champion and junior middleweight titleholder Sugar Ray Leonard, who picked up his guests at the airport. There were other VIPs in attendance that evening. None of them were picked up personally by Leonard at the arrivals hall.

Hagler's blasé acceptance of Leonard's invitation was key to an emergent, elaborate, some might suggest Machiavellian plot.

The menu featured traditional steakhouse fare, including prime rib, liver, lamb, salmon, grilled swordfish and shrimp entrées. The two fighters ordered steaks. Muta Malik, the chef with whom Leonard shared an in-house joke that he should keep a blade handy just in case he and Hagler were ever to face off, cooked each cut to perfection. At the table, the man who had instigated the meeting continued to play the perfect host, pouring liberally from a bottle of Dom Perignon. While his wife, Juanita, conversed with Bertha about their kids, the men whose careers in the ring had run parallel but never intersected – not with them gloved up in opposite corners anyway – spoke warmly of the war they had never made.

"No verdict," Leonard revealed, "just about what kind of fight it would have been."

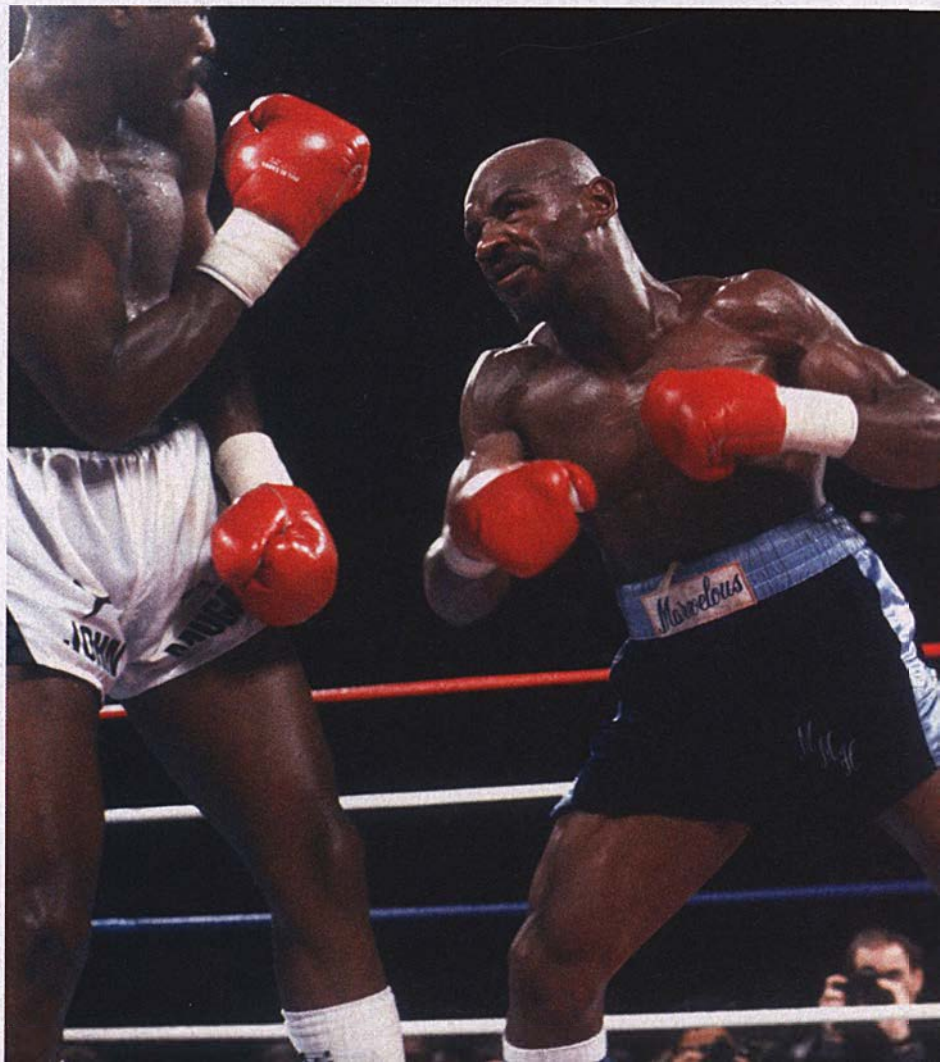
With every sip of champagne, they became more outspoken, but the atmosphere remained relaxed, convivial even, and on one thing they were in complete agreement.

"We talked about it as the Fight of the Century," Leonard said. "The best against the best." As provocative and polarizing in its own way as had been, a decade earlier, Muhammad Ali's defining rivalry with Joe Frazier.

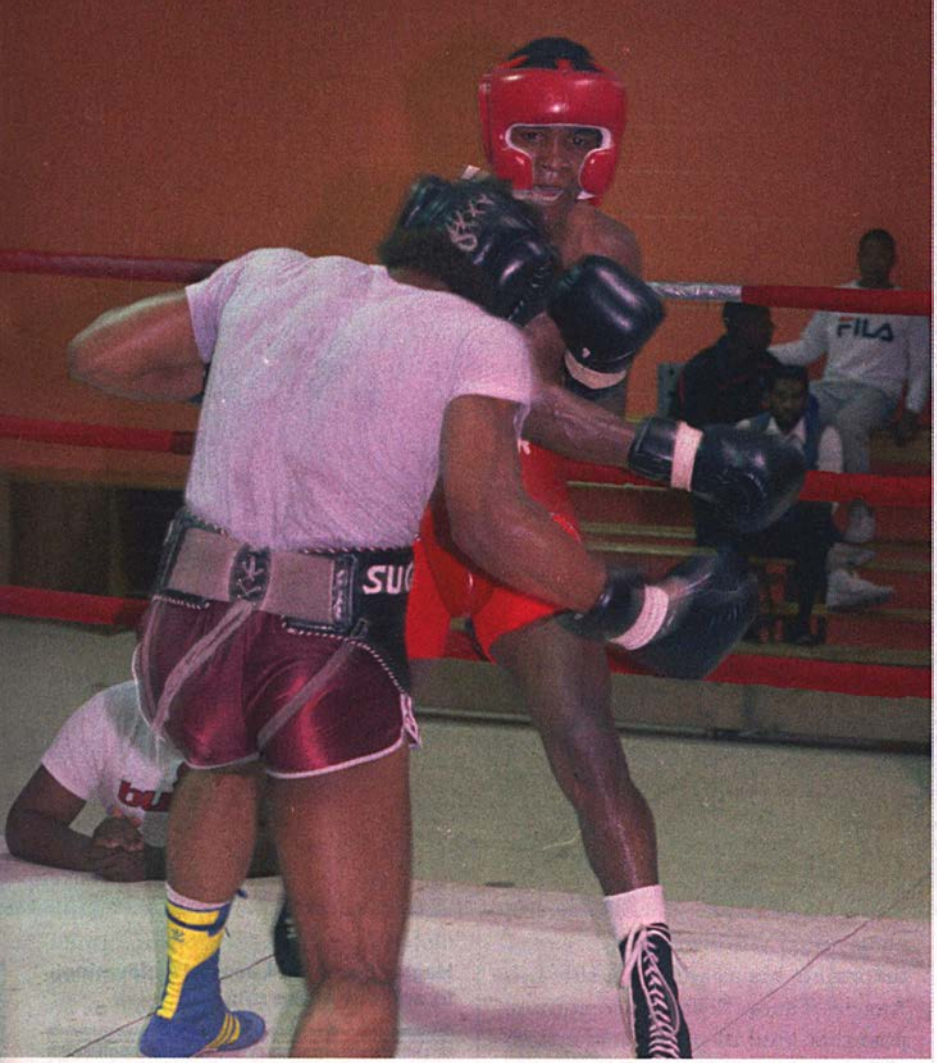
Leonard was Ali's successor, the most charismatic, bankable and virtuoso exponent of his trade. The standard-bearer for his sport. Apolitical with multicultural appeal, courted by corporate America, championed by the TV networks, paraded and fawned over on the chat show circuit. The cool, acceptable face of boxing post-Ali.

To Hagler, he was always "pretty boy," a description the middleweight king spat out with contempt. The antithesis in almost every respect of the spartan, blue-collar outsider who, by overwhelming force of will during Leonard's absence from combat, climbed the ranks to establish himself as the feared ruler of sports' red-light district. "When a man steps into the ring," Hagler would intone, as a priest might profess his faith, "he's going to war."

In his most recent engagement, eight minutes of the most furious violence in a temporary arena on the tennis courts at the back of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, he had overpowered Tommy Hearns, the Hitman from Detroit, flaunting such shocking levels of malevolent intent that when the question was posed as to whom he should fight next, one stunned onlooker was moved to suggest with a shudder: "How about Russia?"



Prior to facing Leonard, Hagler emerged victorious from a brutal war with John "The Beast" Mugabi.



Leonard prepared diligently for his greatest-ever challenge.

Nine months on from that inexorably destructive night, Hagler exuded only good humor and bonhomie while Leonard popped open another magnum of champagne. And why not? Hagler was between training camps, or "prison" as he liked to refer to the torturous isolation, and Sugar Ray was in sweet retirement. So, however uncharacteristic, Hagler felt safe when he lowered his guard.

"Truth is, Ray, I'm not as motivated as I used to be," Hagler acknowledged. "Like I always say, it's tough to get out of bed at 5 a.m. to do roadwork when you've been sleeping in silk pajamas."

"No shit!" Leonard responded. Both men laughed.

"I get cut more easily, too, these days," Hagler continued. Not that blood ever threatened to douse his fire. When the claret flowed into his eyes from a wound just above the bridge of his nose in the third round against Hearns, prompting referee Richard Steele to call a temporary cessation so the ringside doctor could inspect the cut, Hagler remorselessly clubbed the challenger into oblivion within 30 seconds of the fight's resumption.

But the cuts – and injuries – were happening more frequently now. A title defense against the man known as The Beast, unbeaten [future] junior middleweight titleholder John Mugabi, had to be postponed when Hagler suffered a broken nose in sparring. "A blessing in disguise," he mused. "It gave me time to rest my back. My back was the reason my nose was broken. If I flinched the wrong way, my back hurt. I saw the head-butt coming, but I didn't want to move to get out of the way – so I took the butt!"

"No shit!" Leonard echoed, wide-eyed and smiling broadly.

This was a Hagler to whom Leonard could completely relate. His own motivation had eroded, too, even prior to the detached retina in his left eye, which prompted his premature retirement at the age of 26. While at the peak of his physical powers. The conqueror of Hearns and Roberto Duran, whom he humiliated in their rematch, inconceivably making the legendary Hands of Stone quit mid-fight. Ambivalent thoughts had flooded Leonard's mind when inferior opponents such as Bruce Finch and Roger Stafford (whom he was scheduled to face until the bout got canceled when he underwent emergency surgery on his eye) were due to answer the bell. He was bereft of challenge and he felt this acutely. Now Hagler was expressing to him that same ebbing desire, those same inner conflicts.

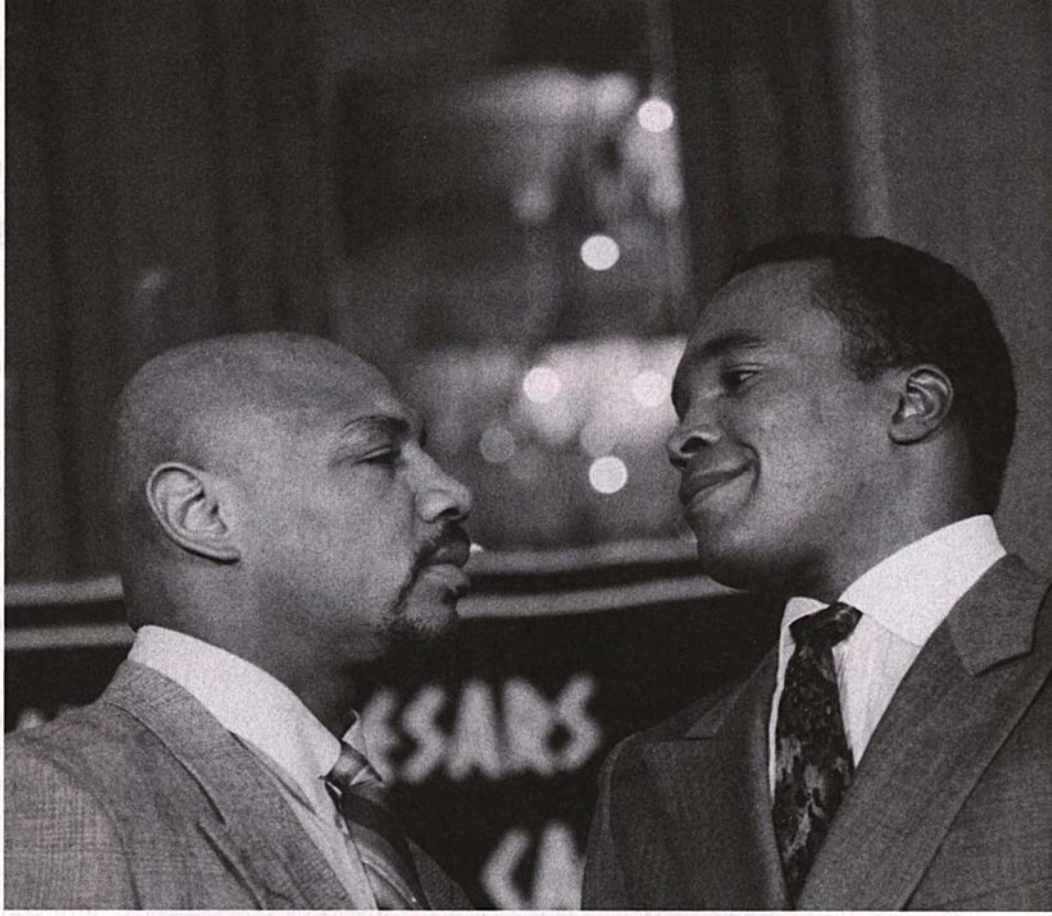
While they had never been friends – and never would be – Hagler's openness showed he no longer viewed Leonard as a rival. For his part, Leonard betrayed not a hint to Hagler about contemplating a comeback to the wars.

"All night long, he told me things," Leonard reflected. "I could relate

"LIKE I ALWAYS SAY, IT'S TOUGH TO GET OUT OF BED AT 5 A.M. TO DO ROADWORK WHEN YOU'VE BEEN SLEEPING IN SILK PAJAMAS."
- MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER

to him because I had experienced those same feelings that I didn't want to train anymore or go to the gym, just didn't want to box anymore. This was before the injury to my eye. I was on the verge of retiring anyway. I'd lost that drive, that intensity and focus, that desire. I didn't have the same discipline or self-motivation that's essential to being on top.

"So I understood what Marvin was going through mentally, that he was contemplating retirement himself, and therefore I thought this could be prime time to get him. Of course, I didn't share that with Marvin."



Hagler detested Leonard's clowning, in and out of the ring.

Eight weeks had passed since Hagler and Leonard broke bread at Jameson's. The desert air was cold in Vegas, but the rain that had presented a miserable backdrop throughout the evening's preliminary bouts relented just as Hagler went to work for $5 million. As a 12-year-old, Mugabi had elected wisely to pull his punches when sparring with Idi Amin, self-declared heavyweight champion of all East Africa, persuaded if not by the firing squad on standby then almost certainly by a belt the Butcher of Uganda wore over his Air Force uniform on which were displayed three dozen bullets. Idi's reputation with his fists was surpassed only by his reputation with a revolver in hand.

Mugabi's reputation and unbeaten resumé were formidable now, too. Only one of his 26 opponents had lasted into the 10th round before he was stopped like all the others. In total, Mugabi had been required to box only 73 rounds, averaging 2.8 rounds per fight. America's most celebrated columnist, Jim Murray, informed his readers in the Los Angeles Times: "The last creature to post that kind of record had stripes and claws."

Leonard sat ringside with actor Michael J. Fox, with whom he had flown in on a private jet chartered by an entrepreneur in whose real estate they were co-investors. A cooler and bottles of beer kept them company.

"Mugabi will be Hagler's toughest opponent," Mickey Duff had promised, and the challenger was true to his manager's word.

From the opening bell, Mugabi boxed effectively and punched hard. Hagler, steam rising from his shaven skull, was made to fight, according to Murray, "like a guy trying not to get thrown off a precipice." Only Hagler's resilience and diamond-hard resolve propelled him through the brutal ordeal, a torrent of punishment, before he was able to break down the Ugandan with bludgeoning blows and pound him into submission finally and emphatically in Round 11.

Leonard watched the entire struggle with intensifying resolution, visualizing himself in the ring with Hagler, becoming more pumped with every volley Mugabi bounced off Hagler's head, discerning precisely how he could control the ring, outbox him and win. Fifteen seconds at the beginning of a round, 15 seconds in the middle, 15 seconds at the end. When Leonard put together their conversation over dinner with what he had just witnessed from ringside – "not the same fire inside him, not the same guy" – he was convinced it was "now or never."

"I turned to Michael sitting beside me and I told him firmly, 'I can beat this guy,'" Leonard recalled.

"Sure you can, Ray," Fox replied before he reached into the cooler. "Here, have another beer."

They finished up at a party in Whoopi Goldberg's hotel suite, where some more actors, including Rob Lowe, joined them. Intoxicated now by his flight of fantasy as much as by the alcohol, Leonard shared with anyone who would listen his thoughts on the fight and his insistence, "I can

beat this guy."

Lowe – who had once engaged in some semi-serious fisticuffs with Tom Cruise, landing a clean shot that provoked Cruise and rattled Lowe, who quickly concluded, "He's ready to kill me!" – had never met Fox before, but they hit it off.

"Both of us were big fans of beverages, and so we started buying each other drinks and talking crazy, good-natured, competitive smack," he remembered. "At one point, we were seriously contemplating our chances of sucker-punching Sugar Ray Leonard. Seriously. He seemed small to us. Thankfully, even we knew that it would be suicide and that Ray is one of the nicest guys ever. 'Can you imagine if we did it, though?' Michael said, and we both fell about the room, laughing like idiots."

Remarkably, aiming a sucker-punch at Ray Leonard was only a slightly less idiotic proposition at the time than the one the retired boxer was about to make public.

Leonard achieved the impossible in dethroning Hagler.

James Brown, the popular host of The NFL Today on CBS, is affectionately known in the business as J.B. Genial, trusted and versatile – regularly combining sports reporting with news in addition to being an ordained Christian minister. J.B. was on assignment for Channel 9 in Washington, D.C., when he conducted a brief interview with Leonard and posed the obvious question.

Hagler's 12th successful defense of the world middleweight title against Mugabi had taken him to within two defenses of the record for the division set in the 1970s by Carlos Monzon. Following corrective surgery on the detached retina in his left eye and an abortive comeback against Kevin Howard two years previously, Leonard had faithfully maintained the pledge he had made to Juanita and his son, little Ray, that he was done with boxing. Retired for good. His carefully pitched response to J.B. would instantly become headline news.

"People ask me, 'Are you coming back?' and I say, 'No, I'm not coming back,'" Leonard began, "but if Marvin Hagler called me, I would consider something like that."

When Leonard's brother Roger saw the interview play out on TV, his first thought was that if Ray needed to consider anything, it might be to have his mental health examined.

"I called him up and said, 'Ray, is this true?' And he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'What?'

"'So who's gonna be the warm-up guy?'

"He said, 'Hagler.'

"'No, who's gonna be your warm-up?'

"'Hagler.'

"'What?' ... I thought he had lost his mind."

Roger Leonard was not alone.

"It's as if Bjorn Borg decided to come back into tennis and got a bye into the Wimbledon final and was paid $12 million for turning up," declared Hugh McIlvanney of The Observer in London. "We all love Sugar Ray. He possessed everything essential to the great fighting man's armoury: superb technique, speed, fluency, imagination, punching power and a strong chin, and behind his dazzling good looks and the readily summoned charm there was the remorselessness of a street fighter. He was a great man, but what is being said about him now by his admirers relates mainly to what he was. I think he is more memory than substance while thinking of Hagler along with other contemporary middleweights is enough to make a matchmaker feel like an undertaker."

The SuperFight: Marvelous Marvin Hagler-Sugar Ray Leonard by Brian Doogan is available at bookstores and online at Amazon.com.

RELUCTANT ICON

ANN WOLFE MOVED ON TO BETTER THINGS AFTER A BOXING CAREER THAT DIDN'T BRING THE REWARDS SHE DESERVED, BUT THE HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE MADE A MASSIVE IMPACT ON THE SPORT

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Ann Wolfe was a 24-year-old mother of two girls when she first put a pair of boxing gloves on. Her goal wasn't to one day earn a place in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

"What I used boxing for was not to be homeless or be in the street," she said. "That was my way of feeding my children, and the reason I did it was because I couldn't work construction because I didn't want nobody to babysit my children. So I took them to the gym."

Wolfe was a natural, blessed with power not seen in female boxers before or since. Not surprisingly, she ultimately got the call to Canastota as a member of the Class of 2021, but even now it doesn't seem like that was the be-all and end-all of her fistic journey.

"I didn't have a lot of emotions," she said of the moment she was informed that she would be joining Laila Ali, Floyd Mayweather Jr., Wladimir Klitschko and Andre Ward in the IBHOF. "I knew eventually people would know what I did. But boxing is just so bittersweet to me. You love it and hate it all at the same time."

That's a sentiment shared by many in the sport, and Wolfe, 50, has her reasons for this love-hate relationship. Over a career that ran from 1998 to 2006, the Louisiana native who found boxing shortly after moving to Austin, Texas, went 24-1 with 16 knockouts, dominating three weight classes along the way. But despite her resume and popularity among fans, she never got the "big" fight against Ali that everyone wanted to see. And while it's ironic that the two will be inducted into the Hall of Fame at the same time, Wolfe has let any animosity or disappointment that the fight didn't happen go.

"This is how I look at it: Everybody that knows me knows that I'm not gonna run from nobody," she said. "So the fight didn't happen, but that never worried me at all. I know what I was gonna do. I immediately squashed that shit because I really didn't give a damn."

What she did give a damn about were the kids that came into her Austin gym over the years. Whether it was local youngsters trying to stay out of trouble, teenagers looking to get into shape or future pro standouts James Kirkland and Travell Mazion, Wolfe was all in on making sure she did whatever she could to keep them from getting taken in by the streets that once had her.

"Even if I wouldn't have made it into the boxing hall of fame, I put over 200 kids through school and changed a lot of children's lives," she said. "I didn't just box; I took them

(Left) Wolfe at the premier of *Wonder Woman*, and (right) the former champion in the movie.

Wolfe was a major asset to former contender James Kirkland.

with me and I trained them and I went to their school and had lunch with them and I was there for them. I'm way more proud of what I did for these kids and for helping people than I am of any boxing match I've ever had."

That's not to say that Wolfe's career as a trainer has been without disappointments. Her much publicized work with Kirkland became an on-again, off-again relationship, with Kirkland excelling when she was in the corner and falling way short of expectations when she wasn't. Then last July, the 24-year-old Mazion was tragically killed in a car crash.

Wolfe doesn't let these situations take her from her path, though. She's still a fighter, and knowing what the sport did for her, she believes she can make a difference, especially with those who have chosen gun violence over a good, ol' fashioned fistfight.

"WHEN I DID BOX, I WOULD FORGET I WAS GETTING PAID SOMETIMES, BECAUSE I ENJOYED IT. BUT I NEVER LIKED THE POLITICAL PART OF BOXING."

"In this neighborhood, everybody knew that you could come to my gym," she said. "If you weigh 200 pounds, get one of your partners that weigh 200 and you can fight right here. What are you gonna go kill each other for? My son's 13 and he spars a little bit here and there. I told my daughter I need to find somebody to kick his ass. (laughs) And he's a good kid. But once you have a fistfight, it brings a whole totally other thing out of you."

There's a popular T-shirt logo that states "Fighting Solves Everything," and while that's not necessarily true in all cases, it was for Wolfe when she walked into Donald "Pops" Billingsley's gym all those years ago

with her only goal being to take care of her daughters.

"I was always an athlete," she said. "I could dunk a basketball; I could play softball. I was just a natural athlete. The ironic part about the whole situation is that I didn't really learn how to box until after I started training. I was just fighting the hell out of them and just punching them. I was strong and I was in condition, and I had to fight."

Under Billingsley's tutelage, Wolfe had a short, four-fight amateur career, winning three bouts while only losing one via disqualification. And early on, her power was making an impression.

"My first [amateur] fight was Dakota Stone," she recalled. "I hit Dakota so hard, she fell face-first. The next girl, I hit her, she hit the floor. I was knocking girls out with the headgear on."

When the headgear came off, the knockouts kept coming. A lot of them. The only woman to defeat Wolfe was Valerie Mahfood in November 2000, and it's the only fight that she truly wanted to get back.

"I said, 'I want to fight Mahfood two more times.' I didn't care about nothing else. I fought her and I beat her ass twice."

Wolfe decisioned Mahfood in 2003 and 2005. In between, she fought all comers, including a chilling 2004 stoppage of 18-0 Vonda Ward that has rightfully earned recognition as the greatest knockout in women's boxing history.

If "Brown Sugar" had trouble finding willing foes before the Ward fight, that finish made it nearly impossible.

"When I did box, I would forget I was getting paid sometimes, because I enjoyed it," she said. "But I never liked the political part of boxing. Nobody wanted to get their ass in the ring with me. They knew if I touch you ..."

It was over.

Officially, Wolfe's career ended when she was 35 after a 2006 win over Lisa Ested, but in her eyes, it was finished five years earlier. After racing out to a 12-1 record to start her run in the punch-for-pay ranks, she wasn't able to get the bouts she wanted at the frequency she felt she needed.

"I stopped at about 30," said Wolfe. "Even with Kirkland and Travell and all my fighters, in order to be good, you gotta be hot. I'd rather take less money and have eight fights a year. So if you're gonna look at my career, my career lasted two-and-a-half years. Then it was just picking this and picking that.

Wolfe obliterated Vonda Ward in the opening round with one punch.

"I'm not gonna be killing myself and no one wants to get in the damn ring. Everybody talks that shit until you get hit, and I don't hit normal like no regular girl; I hit like a dude. I'm not a mean person; I'm just a normal person, but if we get in that ring and you're gonna swing your fist to try and hit me in the face, I'm gonna fuck you up. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. I'm a natural fighter; it's what I do.

"You box every weekend when you're an amateur, and as soon as you turn pro, you're boxing twice a year, and you're boxing somebody who hardly got skills so you could win," she said. "That's dumb."

Unfortunately, that's been boxing for a long time, but as old-school as Wolfe is as a fighter and a trainer, her mindset is right up there with the legends of the game who believed that the only way you became a great fighter was by fighting.

"I know boxing so well," she said. "I know it upside down and inside out. I'm just trying to find out what it is I want to do, because I'm getting bored. I've got a lot to offer boxing."

She does. And while real estate, working on a book about her life and appearing in the hit Wonder Woman film has kept her busy in recent years, it's clear that she wants to play a more active role in the sweet science as soon as possible. For now, that means embracing her role as one of the greats of women's boxing. That may be a tough sell for the tough lady from Texas, but she does know what she did in the sport and why fans still talk about her today.

"I think it's because they feel that I'm a real, genuine person," Wolfe said. "I try to be nice to everybody and try to validate every human being and try to pull the best that I can pull out of every human, and they feel that realness. There's nothing fake about me, and people can feel it. I think everybody knows that what you see is what you get. I don't live for no money; I don't live for no fame. I want to make my children happy, and if I meet other people, I want to make them happy and make them laugh. And they know: Don't cross me."

Gordon Parks with Muhammad Ali, photo by Howard Bingham.

THE RING IS PROUD TO REPRINT PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ***GORDON PARKS X MUHAMMAD ALI*** PUBLISHED BY THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART IN COLLABORATION WITH THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION. THE BOOK CELEBRATES THE CONVERGENCE OF TWO ICONIC FIGURES IN THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL EQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES AND CARRIES WITH IT THE GRAVITAS OF TWO GIANTS.

Gordon Parks

By **Thomas Hauser**

Gordon Parks was born into rural poverty in Kansas in 1912. He was the youngest of 15 children. His father was a farmer. Parks taught himself the art of photography and, in the 1950s, was the first Black staff photographer hired by Life (then the most popular and influential magazine in the United States).

In 1956, Life sent Parks to photograph the mores of the segregated American South. In 1960, he left his full-time position with the magazine but continued to work for Life on an annual contract basis. A cascade of images chronicling key moments and participants (famous and anonymous) in the Civil Rights Movement followed. Over time, Parks became one of the most acclaimed photo-journalists in the world.

"I don't have time to just make pretty pictures," Parks said years later. "I would think that the stories that I did that touched people, touched lives, and helped lives would be the ones that I would most want to be remembered by."

And speaking of the people who were captured in his photographs, Parks declared, "It's not important at that particular moment that I express my

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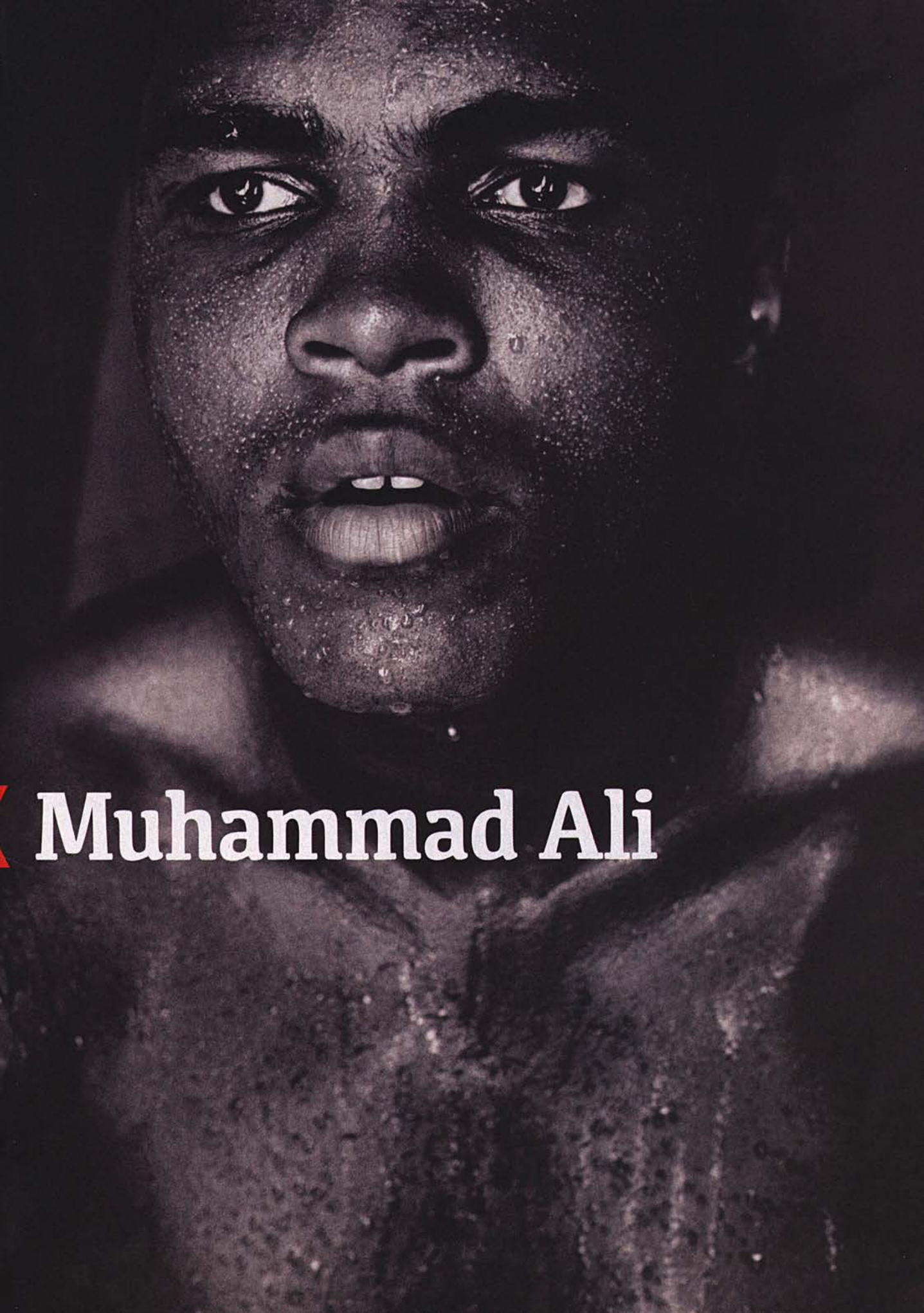
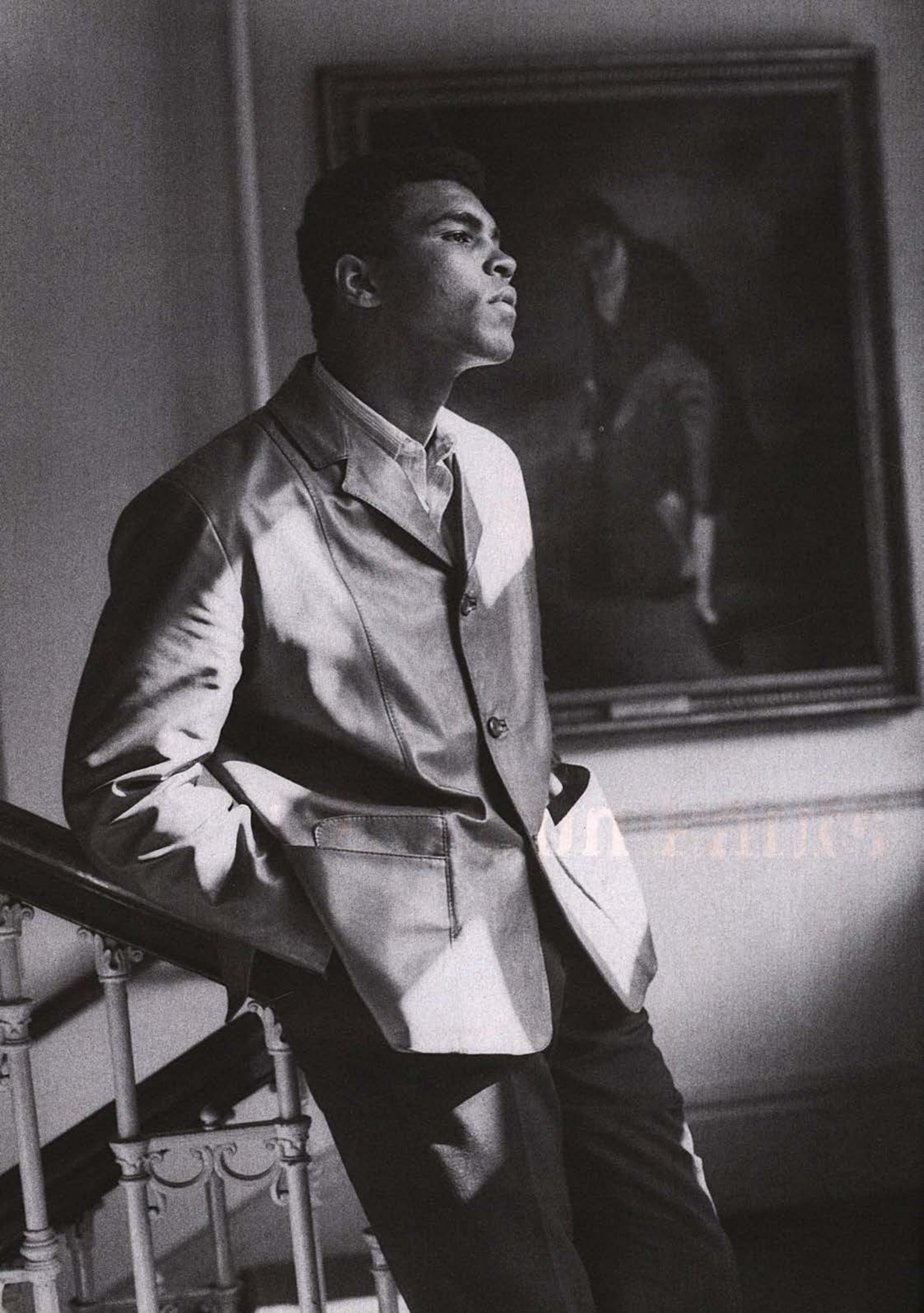

Muhammad Ali



Even at age 24, Ali's hands showed the wear and tear of his profession.

feelings. It's important that I let the world know what they are thinking and what they're going through. So I become an instrument for them. That's what the camera does."

A true renaissance man, Parks was also a successful author, screenwriter, composer, and film director. Among his many film credits, he directed the first (1971) film version of *Shaft* starring Richard Roundtree. He died in 2006 at age 93.

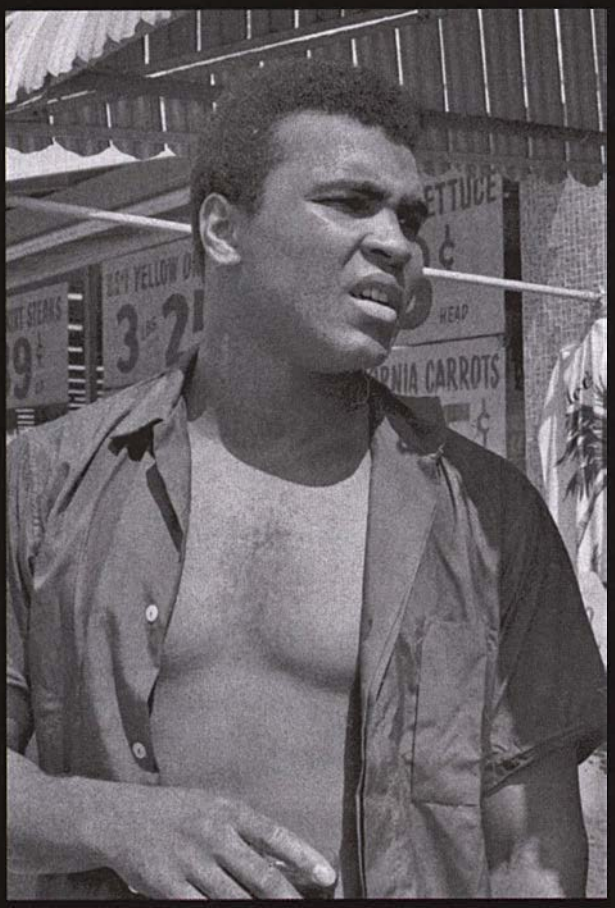
Parks and Ali met in 1966 when Parks was assigned to photograph Muhammad for Life. They represented very different generations in the struggle for Black equality. Parks was 53 years old. He had grown up in an era when the Black athlete on a pedestal was Joe Louis followed in time by Jackie Robinson, both of whom were critical of Ali's stand on racial issues and the military draft.

Ali was 24.

Parks had grave reservations about the road that Ali was taking. And he was familiar with the issues involved, having provided the photographs and text for a 1963 feature in Life on the Nation of Islam and a 1965 piece about Malcolm X that ran in the aftermath of Malcolm's assassination.

"I met Muhammad Ali in Miami when he started training for [his second fight against Henry] Cooper," Parks later recalled. "His public image was in tatters. He stood accused in the press of sins ranging from talking too much to outright anti-white bigotry. There had been rumblings of dislike for him ever since he became a Muslim after the first Clay-Liston fight in February 1964. Then late last winter when he declared, 'I don't have no quarrel with them Vietcongs,' he became in the public eye not just a loudmouthed kid but 'a shameless traitor,' as one paper put it. At that point, I began to feel a certain sympathy for him. There was a side to this brash poetry-spouting kid that I admired. I was not proud of him, as I had been proud of Joe Louis. Muhammad was a gifted black champion and I wanted him to be a hero, but he wasn't making it. I also felt, however, that he could not possibly be quite so bad as he was made out to be in the press."

Parks spent several weeks with Ali in Miami and London in May



and June of 1966. At their introductory meeting, the photographer later recounted, "I felt free to tell him quite directly that I had come to Miami to see whether he was really as obnoxious as people were making him out to be." Parks also confessed to Muhammad that he'd been rooting for Floyd Patterson one year earlier when the two men fought.

But Ali won Parks over. And the fruits of their time together appeared in a photo essay entitled "The Redemption of a Champion" published in the September 9, 1966, issue of Life. Parks also wrote the text, which read in part, "I never witnessed the hate he [Ali] is assumed to have for whites. But I did see him stand in the burning sun for an hour signing autographs for southern white children."

Four years later, Parks photographed Ali in Miami again, this time for the October 23, 1970, issue of Life – a cover story that hit newsstands just prior to Ali's comeback fight against Jerry Quarry in Atlanta.

Altogether, Parks shot roughly one thousand images of Ali, most of them in black-and-white. Twenty-nine were in color – a prerequisite for the 1970 cover.

Gordon Parks X Muhammad Ali has superb production values. It's 218 pages long and printed on 10 by 11½ inch hard, glossy stock. The photographs are divided into three sections: Miami 1966, London 1966 and Miami 1970.

The work also includes essays by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, April M. Watson (a project co-editor), historian Gerald Early, Julián Zugazagoitia (CEO of the Nelson-Atkins Museum

of Art) and Peter W. Kunhardt Jr. (executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation).

Abdul-Jabbar highlights the genius of Parks' photography, writing, "His work revealed the richness as well as the harshness of the lives of black Americans. His images captured the vast depth and abundance of the black experience, the giddy elation and debilitating agonies." Abdul-Jabbar also recounts Parks' reservations regarding Ali's fitness to be a leader in age, upbringing, and political and religious views," Watson writes, "Parks implicitly understood that he and Ali shared a similar struggle as they carved discrete spaces for themselves within a racially inscribed, media-manipulated, social and political landscape. Parks leveraged his own hard-won influence and power, and his access to Life's vast platform, to symbolically extend Ali a helping hand at this critical point in his together. While they had very different stances and ideologies, both men were pioneers in a uniquely American fight for justice."

The original Life photo essays are also reproduced in *Gordon Parks X Muhammad Ali* so readers can see how Parks' images were used in the articles and the text that ran with them. In a sign of the times, seven advertisements with 13 models accompanied the photo essays. Not one ad had a person of color in it.

A prayer before eating

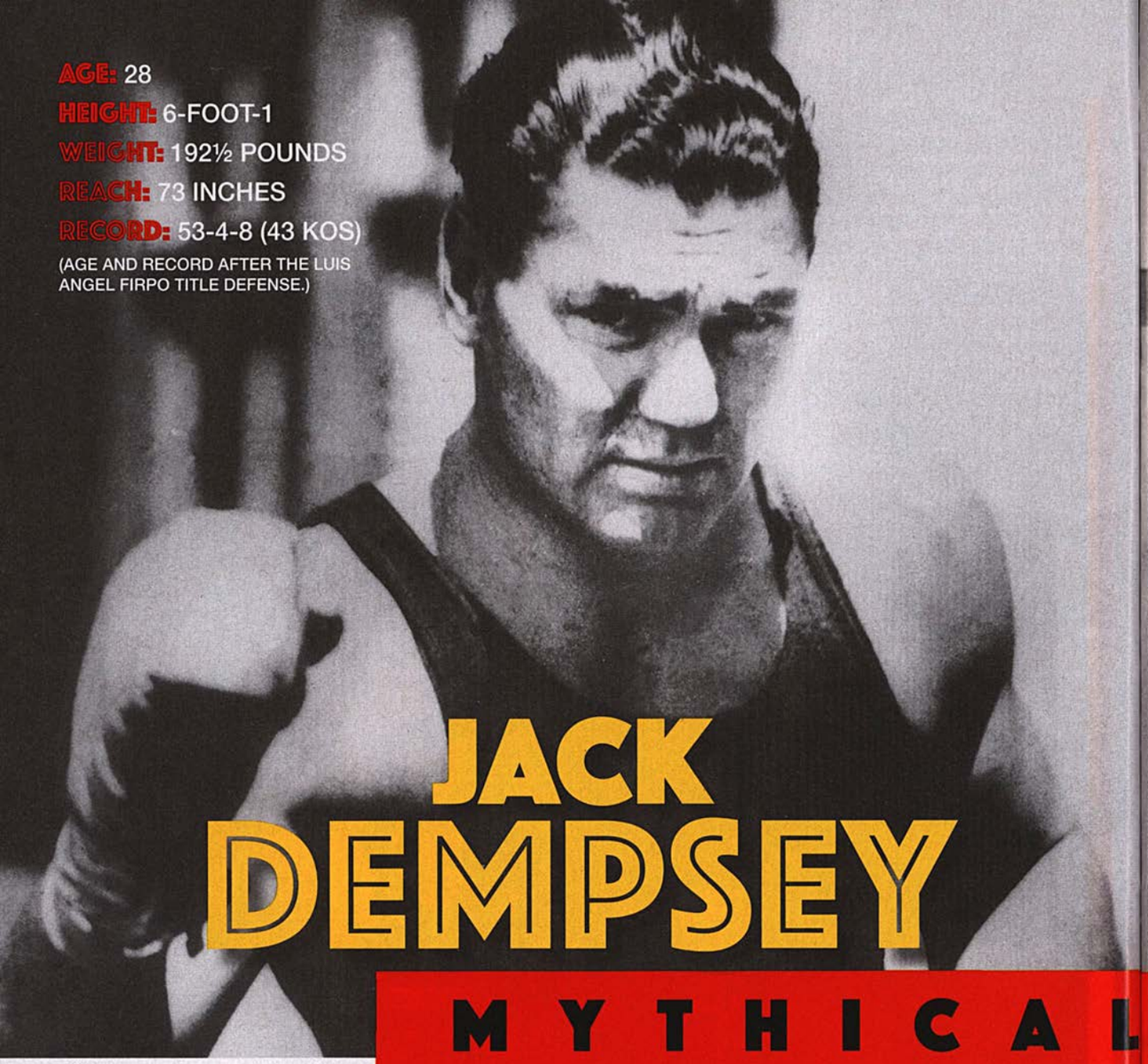
for Black America when the two men first met in 1966. "It's not only white people," Parks told Ali. "A lot of Negroes don't like the way you act."

Watson, in a lengthy and excellent essay, gives Parks his due as a trailblazing craftsman who "worked both within and against a racially inscribed system" and places the Ali-Parks photos in the context of their time.

"Despite considerable differences career as the young fighter was struggling to forge an identity that would ultimately defy the media's preconceptions and proposed narratives."

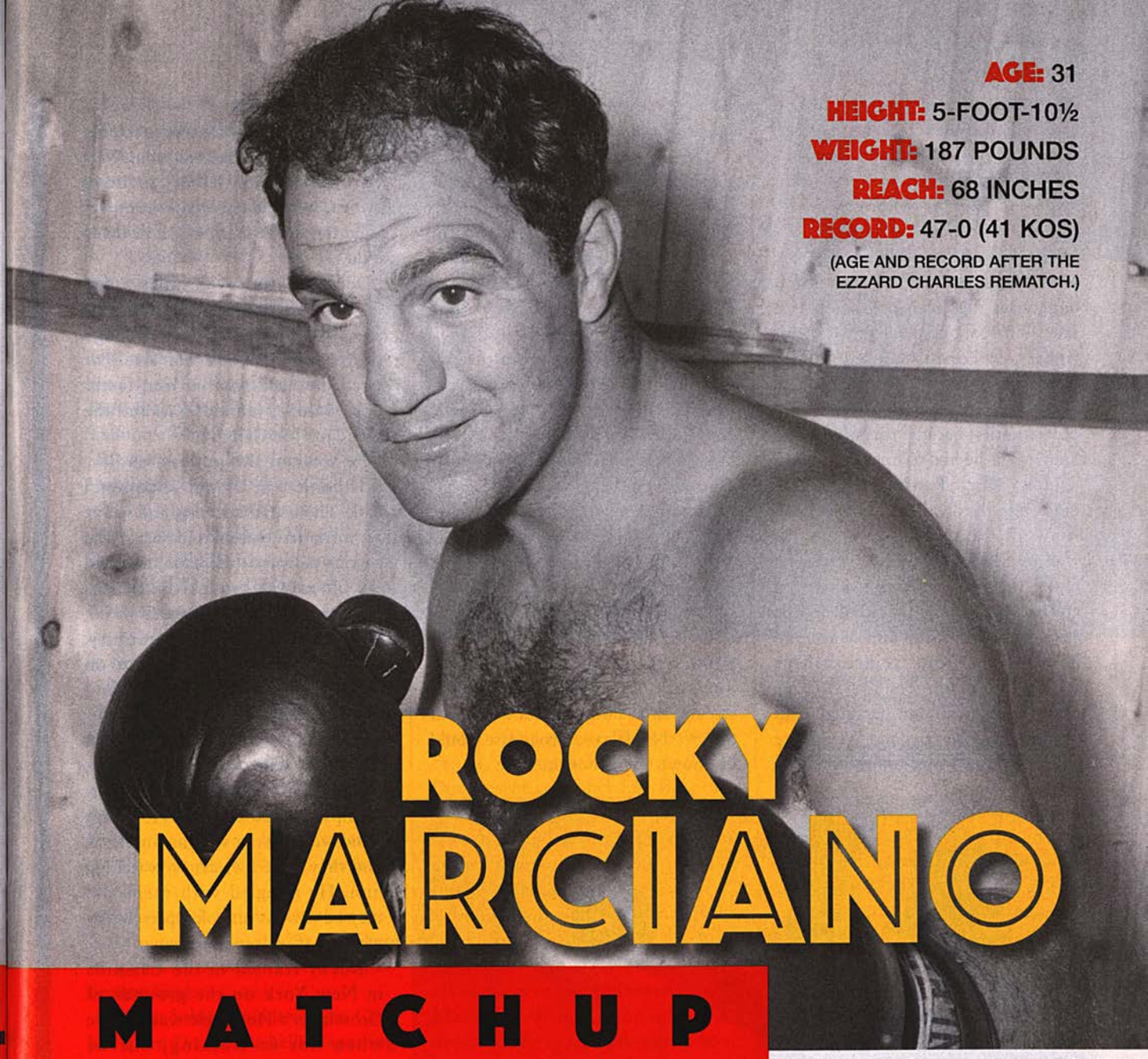
And Watson concludes, "Parks and Ali were linked by more than those two times they worked

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*



AGE: 28
HEIGHT: 6-FOOT-1
WEIGHT: 192½ POUNDS
REACH: 73 INCHES
RECORD: 53-4-8 (43 KOS)
(AGE AND RECORD AFTER THE LUIS ANGEL FIRPO TITLE DEFENSE.)

JACK DEMPSEY



AGE: 31
HEIGHT: 5-FOOT-10½
WEIGHT: 187 POUNDS
REACH: 68 INCHES
RECORD: 47-0 (41 KOS)
(AGE AND RECORD AFTER THE EZZARD CHARLES REMATCH.)

ROCKY MARCIANO

MYTHICAL MATCHUP

Ron Lipton is a veteran world-class referee, a former amateur boxer and historian who was inducted into the New York and New Jersey boxing halls of fame. He previously penned two well-received mythical matchups – Rocky Graziano vs. Rubin Carter and Dick Tiger vs. Canelo Alvarez – for The Ring, but he says he's saved his best for this one.

"The result of this particular mythical matchup has the potential to generate deep-rooted feelings of approval or anger, because it involves two legendary heavyweight champions," said Lipton. "One epitomized the Roaring Twenties, the other helped usher in TV's Golden Age during the 1950s. Both are idolized by boxing fans to this day."

By the end of this article, I will bring you ringside with me to Madison Square Garden for a historical main event: Jack Dempsey vs. Rocky Marciano for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world.

In one corner we have Dempsey, who beat Jess Willard for the lineal championship in 1919 at age 24 and became the biggest star of the sports world during his reign of five title defenses, culminating with his epic shootout with Luis Angel Firpo in 1923. In the other corner we have Marciano, who knocked out Jersey Joe Walcott to win the Ring Magazine championship in 1952 at age 29 and emerged as a boxing hero as he defended the title with fight-of-the-year battles, including a dramatic stoppage of Ezzard Charles in their 1954 rematch.

I have put more thought and study into this mythical matchup than any I have ever done. Styles make fights in boxing, and in their case, search-and-destroy mentalities create wild and explosive outcomes. There could be a rematch with a different result, but this is what I believe would happen the first time both men clashed.

I will pull historic boxing figures from different eras and bring them alive with a stretch of poetic license.

THE MAKING OF THE FIGHT:
Jack Dempsey had disposed of Willard and Firpo in brutal fashion and was thinking of answering the allure of show business and all the tempting life-changing offers pouring in.

Jimmy DeForest, his legendary trainer and cornerman, who had guided Stanley Ketchel, Jim Jeffries and Joe Gans among other greats, always said that Dempsey was his favorite. As far as DeForest was concerned, there wasn't a man alive who Dempsey could not overpower. Dempsey's right hand was nicknamed "Iron Mike," his left hook "Big Bertha;" both punches had the impact of nitroglycerin exploding.

DeForest believed Dempsey was the fastest and hardest-hitting heavyweight ever, and the most ferocious. He often said that Jack wasn't satisfied until his opponent was lying senseless at his feet.

But DeForest was worried sick that everything they worked so hard to achieve would go down the drain if the Manassa Mauler lost his fighting edge. The siren call of Hollywood threatened to take Dempsey away from the spartan existence that made him great. DeForest knew that Dempsey's hunger and passion for fighting were what set him apart. Boxing was not just a sport or business to Dempsey; he possessed that savage magic that Ketchel had, but had it in spades. DeForest would be damned if he would let anything ruin it.

They needed motivation to grab Dempsey's attention and turn it back to fighting. The perfect "motivator" would be the main challenger to Dempsey's lineal championship, the man with the Ring title and the other major sanctioning organization belts,

BETTMANN

Rocky Marciano. The public was clamoring for them to fight. DeForest knew Charley Goldman, Rocky's boxing guru and mentor, and had the utmost respect for the boxer-turned-trainer's old-school knowledge.

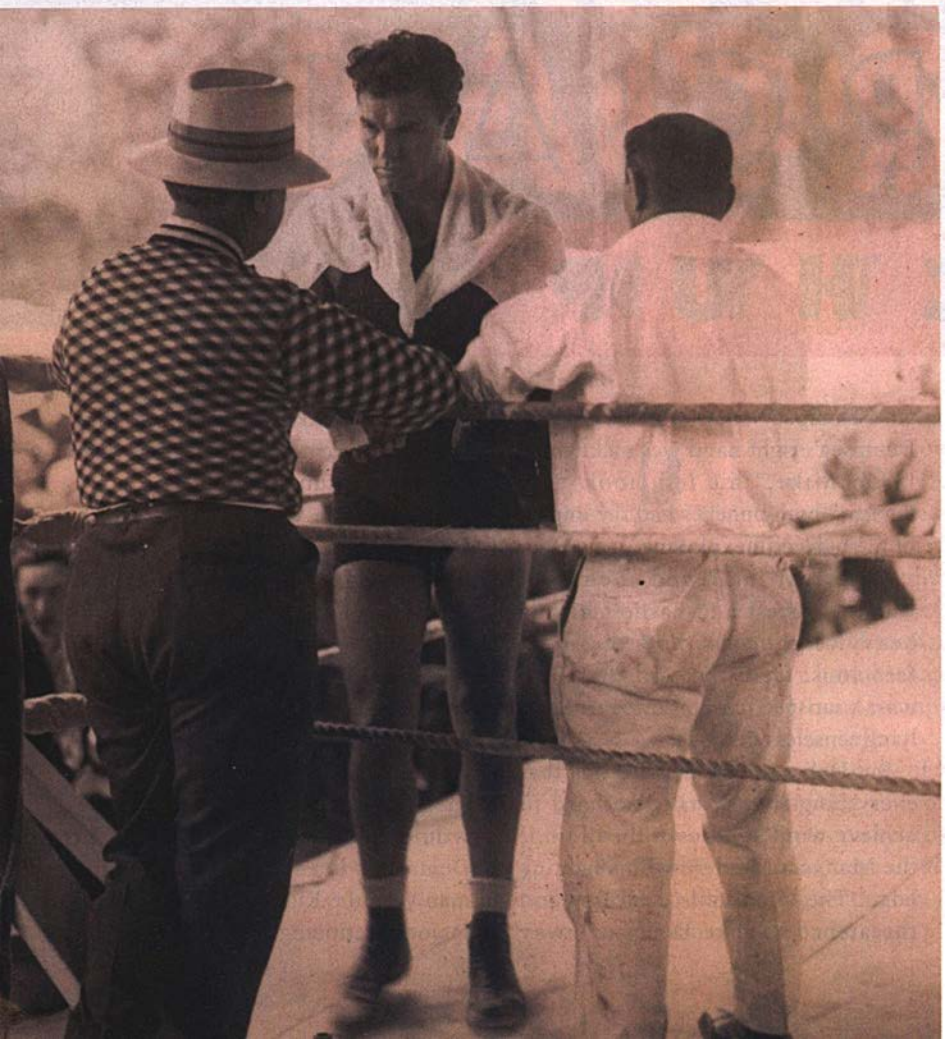
Thanks to Goldman's development, Marciano would be the most dangerous foe Dempsey would ever face, but DeForest had faith in his fighter. DeForest scouted Rocky. It was as if he put the essence of Marciano into a pipe and smoked deeply until it became part of him. He knew what he had to know.

Jack "Doc" Kearns, Dempsey's manager, had to negotiate with Al Weill, Marciano's manager, as well as Madison Square Garden to make the fight, but coming to an equitable agreement would not be easy. Both Dempsey and Marciano had tempestuous relationships with their managers for various reasons, financial and personal. And because both Kearns and Weill were equally shrewd and immutable, the negotiations with Weill and Kearns quickly became intolerable.

The bickering between the managers was ugly, almost digressing to fistfights at times. However, their fighters wanted to settle who the real heavyweight champion was with a showdown in Madison Square Garden. So, a 50-50 split was eventually agreed to as well as equal percentages from the live streaming, films and merchandising. Finally, the contracts were signed for a 12-round undisputed heavyweight championship fight with 10-ounce gloves.

The boxing world trembled with anticipation and the Garden was sold out within 20 minutes of the box office opening.

Ringside tickets were set at $5,000; the cheapest seats were $300, and people paid it without question. The live pay-per-view stream on various outlets was set at $99.99. No delayed broadcast would be shown for a month.



The Manassa Mauler talks shop with manager Jack "Doc" Kearns.

TRAINING CAMPS

Dempsey was in DeForest's training camp, which was moved from West Allenhurst, New Jersey, to Long Branch, New Jersey, where Dempsey could run in the sand, which he loved to do.

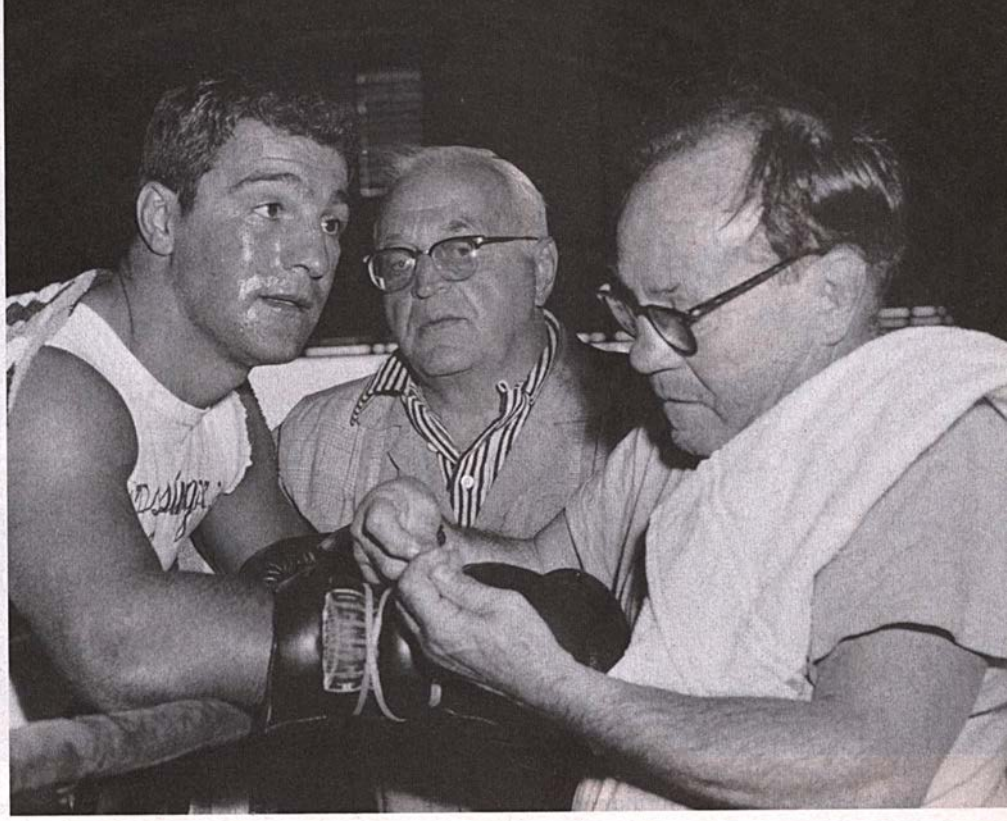
Dempsey ran seven miles a day on the beach and punished his sparring partners, Big George Godfrey and 6-foot-5 Bill Tate. For speed, he used smaller and faster Jock Malone, Jamaica Kid and the legendary Joe Gans.

He worked the pulleys, endless calisthenics, neck and abdominal work. The brutal sparring and heavy bag work had real-fight intensity. The sparring partners suffered injuries and new blood was brought in. Kearns hired David Tua and George Chuvalo, both known for their durability, with orders to keep the pressure on Dempsey from bell to bell. Tate and Gans stayed on.

Dempsey was different from Marciano, who was very private, especially with his training camps. Dempsey loved crowds. He didn't mind working out with an audience, and they were awestruck watching him. He mingled with them and they adored his outgoing personality while he was deep in training.

Rocky trained in the Catskills in New York on the grounds of Grossinger's Hotel. He was affable when not in training, but he changed when preparing for a fight. Marciano cut off communication with his family and friends and refused to speak to anyone, including members of his camp, unless it related to the fight.

His training quarters were off-limits to the other hotel guests. The hotel staff had strict orders to leave him alone and not to allow any strangers to meet with him. His diet was strictly monitored, and no food from outside of the camp confines was allowed.



The Rock gets laced up by trainer Charley Goldman while manager Al Weill looks on.

Marciano's training sessions were closed to the public and the media, which drove the promoters crazy. But he trained like a triathlete. Goldman was preparing him for a shootout with Dempsey that could go the full 12 rounds at top speed.

Marciano's edge against all competitors was his stamina, which was on display during long sparring sessions with Toxie Hall, Nino Valdez, Keene Simmons, Tommy "Hurricane" Jackson and Gene Gosney. Marciano brutalized them all.

Goldman then brought in Curtis "Hatchet Man" Sheppard, Bob Satterfield and Cleveland Williams. He figured if Rocky could handle those big punchers, Dempsey would be easy.

DeForest had a friend of his check into Grossinger's as a guest to keep an eye on what was going on. When reports came back that these heavy punchers and iron-jawed fighters were brought in, DeForest smiled slyly as he chewed on his trademark cigar.

"It won't help, Rocky. Nothing will."

But when DeForest found out that Goldman brought in Harry Greb to spar with Marciano in secret, he became livid.

Despite being a middleweight, Greb had given Dempsey a hellish sparring session years ago, and there was even talk of them fighting at one time.

Now DeForest would bring in someone who would counter that move. He sent word to his friend Stanley Ketchel, "The Michigan Assassin," who would be brought in not to spar with Dempsey, but to provide a psychological edge in response to Greb being in the other camp.

Meanwhile, the war of words between Kearns and Weill was getting almost as much press as the fight.

Dempsey could not stand the way Kearns always took center stage, often boasting to the press that he taught Dempsey all he knew. DeForest should have received more credit, and Jack knew it.

Dempsey asked Kearns to lay off that stuff in public. Kearns, while drunk, put up his hands and told Dempsey he could lick him right then and there. Disgusted, Dempsey glared fiercely at the slender manager and cursed at him under his breath as he turned his back and walked away.

Marciano had it worse with Weill. When Rocky was starting out, Weill got him to sign away 50 percent of his earnings to him and never allowed Marciano to make the money he deserved. Both fighters would have rather knocked out their managers than fight each other.

The managers' egos got out of hand before the fighters took part in HBO's *Face Off* feature with Max Kellerman moderating.

As Rocky and Jack waited off-stage for Kellerman to get ready for the show, Weill started shooting his mouth off to Kearns, loud enough for everyone to hear: "You better pay up Dempsey's medical insurance, because he's going to need it, and your meal ticket will be gone, you crooked grifter. Your guy gasses out, Rocky is going to crush him."

A triggered Kearns retorted: "You chiseling punk, you still robbing Rocky? Your guy has been beating old men! They're all worn-out retreads, for Christ's sake. Walcott knocked him on his ass with a left hook. It took Rocky 13 rounds to beat that old man. Roland LaStarza beat him the first fight. The rest of his record is bullshit; he's been fighting sparring partners who you paid off."

Weill went berserk, rushing and swinging at Kearns. In an instant, the two old men were rolling around on the floor gouging, choking and punching each other. HBO security broke it up and escorted both of them out of the building.

Dempsey and Marciano watched in gut-wrenching embarrassment before being fitted with microphones and brought up to sit at opposite sides of the table with Kellerman.

Minutes before the show started, Dempsey said softly to Marciano, "Sorry about this, Rocky; it's none of my doing. I apologize for him." Marciano replied: "Same for me, Jack. It was sickening." They shook hands across the table.

The fighters conducted the interview with mutual respect no

matter how hard Kellerman tried to get them to make a prediction or reveal what their fight plan was.

The fireworks between the fighters would not start until they shared the ring.

One week before the fight, Dempsey sat alone in his training camp quarters when DeForest knocked softly on the door. Jack told him to come in.

King, Jack's powerful fighting pit bull lay across his legs, sleeping on the spartan bed. King was cool with Jimmy but as always was instantly alert, like a sleeping lion, to make sure there was no threat to his beloved master, whom he did road work with.

"Jack, we have to talk about this fight now. My guy at Grossinger's hotel says Goldman has Marciano training for 12 rounds of constant punching. He's running 12-15 miles a day and beating the dog shit out of the sparring partners. Rocky doesn't draw a breath. He fights out of a crouch, as you know, and breaks down the body until he can throw his over-the-top 'Suzie Q' – the right hand he dropped Rex Lane with – or the short, straight right that won the title for him. He's also got that left hook that finished Moore and Carmine Vingo and scored that first knockdown against Joe Louis.

"His recuperative powers and balls say one thing to me, Jack: We can't let him get started. He's a slow starter that needs to warm up, but he's still aggressive right out of the gate, and his thing is to close the gap, take up the slack, come in low and break your ribs to pieces. He takes quick, small steps to get close and gets stronger as the fight goes on.

"So, I'm gonna give you the best strategic advice we all could figure when we put our heads together. We gave hours of thought and conversation to this. We asked everyone – Jimmy 'The Greek,' Bill Tate, Joe Gans, Ketchel and Kearns – pooled all our collective boxing experience and this is the best boxing genius shit we came up with, Jack: As soon as that opening bell rings, pull up your socks and knock him the fuck out.

"Now it's your turn to speak. With this dangerous guy, I have to ask you, Mr. Dempsey, what is your plan? What are you going to do?"

Jack sat there with no smile. As soon as his camp had closed to the public, Dempsey hadn't smiled once for the last two weeks, which pleased DeForest. Dempsey had become a snarling tiger with two days' growth of beard already on him.

Dempsey looked right through DeForest, totally silent while deep in thought.

"Well Jack, what are you going to do? You're doing the fighting," DeForest said.

Without the slightest bit of jest in his voice, Dempsey replied: "I'm going to pull up my socks and knock him out."

Back at Grossinger's, four days before the fight, all the hard work was done. The sparring partners were gone. Goldman and assistant trainers Freddie Brown and Allie Colombo were taking an after-dinner walk with Rocky. Weill was back in the hotel making phone calls.

Goldman was the voice that no one dared interrupt when it came to fight talk.

"Rocky, we are going to fight him like we trained to do. Stick to the game plan and fight your fight. Play him close; don't give him any punching room and start breaking down his body right away. Drag him into deep waters where he will gas out. No one has your stamina; use it to win. When he is tired, let him have the Suzie Q, not slow but like a bolt of lightning, greased and tied to a snake's tongue. Save it until the time is right. Let him have some each round until he gets careless, and then take him out."

Brown and Colombo nodded their heads in agreement.

THE FIGHT

The Garden is sold out and every celebrity imaginable is there.

HBO's broadcasters are ringside with Jim Lampley, Larry Merchant, Max Kellerman and Ray Arcel. Both fighters, looking cool as ice but with deadly focus, are on the big screen from their dressing rooms, where they are getting their hands wrapped under the supervision of the New York State Athletic Commission.

DeForest wrapped Dempsey's hands with Colombo watching

for the Marciano camp. Goldman lovingly taped Rocky's hands as Jimmy "The Greek" Luvadis watched.

"It is going to come down to Marciano's stamina, relentless pressure and power against Dempsey's two-fisted onslaught, youth and speed," Merchant said at the start of the broadcast. "Both can take a tremendous punch, and the word 'quit' doesn't enter into either of their thinking."

Michael Buffer stands ready for the introductions in the ring, resplendent in his tuxedo, and, per the boxers' agreement, "The Star-Spangled Banner" is played before they emerge from their dressing rooms.

The "legends" introductions bring tremendous ovations from the crowd as Stanley Ketchel greets the crowd, then Harry Greb, Joe Louis, Ezzard Charles, Luis Angel Firpo, Jess Willard and Jack Johnson.

When Greb enters the ring, Ketchel purposely bumps into him and says something that makes Greb answer back in anger. Commission inspectors get between them and peace is restored. The crowd loves it, because the rumor is they are signed to fight for the middleweight title.

The introductions are over. A dazzling light show bathes the arena in an ethereal display of purple and red.

Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Suzie Q" blares, driving the crown into a frenzy as Marciano makes his way to the ring with the diminutive bucket-carrying Goldman, swabs stuck behind his ears. Rocky is wearing his dark blue robe trimmed in white with the pointy hood hiding his face like a monk. Colombo, Weill and Brown trot behind him.

Charlie and Allie sit on the third rope as Rocky ducks into the ring and the crowd roars.

Everyone looks for Dempsey as the spotlight focuses on his aisle, and here he comes with Kearns leading the way. DeForest is behind Dempsey, with Luvadis and Big Bill Tate bringing up the rear. Jack is unshaven, wears no robe, just an old red woolen sweater he wore in training camp, looking like a stone-cold killer.

The promoters asked Dempsey about his walk-in music. "Music? I came here to fight, not dance."

The heavyweights are in the ring and there isn't a heart that isn't pounding with excitement. Buffer announces:

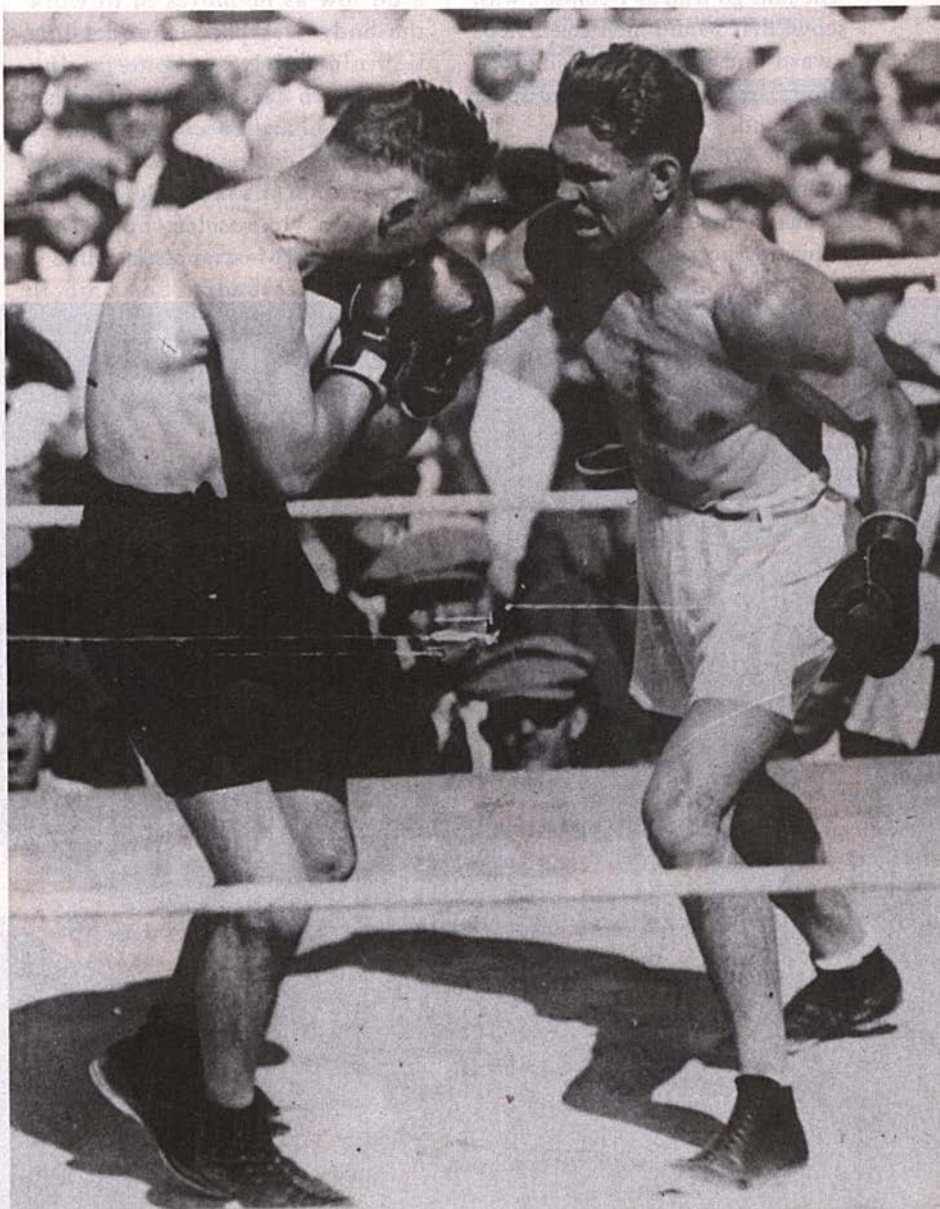
"Ladies and gentleman, this is the main event of the evening, the fight we have all been waiting for: 12 rounds of boxing for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world! It's brought to you by Al Weill Promotions and Jack Kearns Enterprises in conjunction with Madison Square Garden Boxing, sanctioned by the New York State Athletic Commission.

"The three judges scoring from ringside assigned by the New York State Athletic Commission are Harold Lederman, Tony Castellano and Al Berl.

"Inside the ring, the man in charge of the action when the bell rings is championship veteran Charlie White.

"Now the officials are ready, the fighters in the ring are ready, and for the thousands in attendance and the millions watching around the world: Are you ready? Ladies and gentleman... **LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!"**

Buffer's famous introduction thunders through the Garden, and around the world the boxing crowd



TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

Dempsey attacked foes with shocking power and relentless savvy.

explodes in response.

"Introducing first in the blue corner, wearing the black trunks with white trim, weighing in officially at 187 pounds with a record of 47 wins, no losses with 41 knockouts, hailing from Brockton, Massachusetts, the undefeated, unified heavyweight champion of the world: THE BROCKTON BLOCKBUSTER, ROCKY MARCIANO!"

The crowd's response is deafening as Rocky raises one glove.

"And in the red corner, wearing all white silk trunks with the star-studded sash, weighing 192½ pounds with a record of 53 wins, 4 losses and 8 draws with 43 knockouts, hailing from Manassa, Colorado, the reigning lineal heavyweight champion of the world: THE MANASSA MAULER, JACK DEMPSEY!"

The fans go wild as Dempsey, with a scowl that would melt steel, steps forward and without the slightest smile raises one gloved hand for a brief second.

Charlie White calls out, "Just the fighters and their chief seconds," then beckons them all to mid-ring. "I've given you the rules. Let's get this straight right now. If either of you hits a man on the deck, I'll disqualify you on the spot. Tell me right now if you understand. Dempsey?

Jack nods; Rocky does likewise.

White continues, "No fouls will be tolerated. You knock down your opponent, stop punching, go to the farthest neutral corner and stay there until I call you out. Protect yourselves at all times. Now touch gloves and come out fighting."

FIRST ROUND

Marciano comes out of his corner in a crouch and tries to work in close to Dempsey, who weaves and pivots as fast as a middleweight to the side. Dempsey feints while darting in and out.

Marciano regroups and straightens his stance up with his gloves held a bit low as he moves in to work the body. Dempsey explodes like lightning, driving bone-jarring punches to the body that land so fast it is hard to count them. A thundering five-punch combination digs into Rocky's body. The finishing shot is a vicious left hook that cracks onto Marciano's jaw like a grenade exploding, and the Brockton Blockbuster is dropped to his knees.

Dempsey runs to the neutral corner as the crowd is stunned into total silence for a few seconds, then erupts in a roar of shock. White is counting as Marciano, visibly stunned by the left hook that landed flush over his low-held right hand, struggles to his feet.

He is up at seven and takes the mandatory eight count.

White waves them on. Dempsey is on Marciano, twisting, turning, snarling like a jaguar, driving straight shots between the gloves. Marciano tries to duck under power punches as he is driven back. Dempsey ducks under a looping, over-the-top right hand from Marciano and both fighters bang heads as each tries to weave lower than the other.

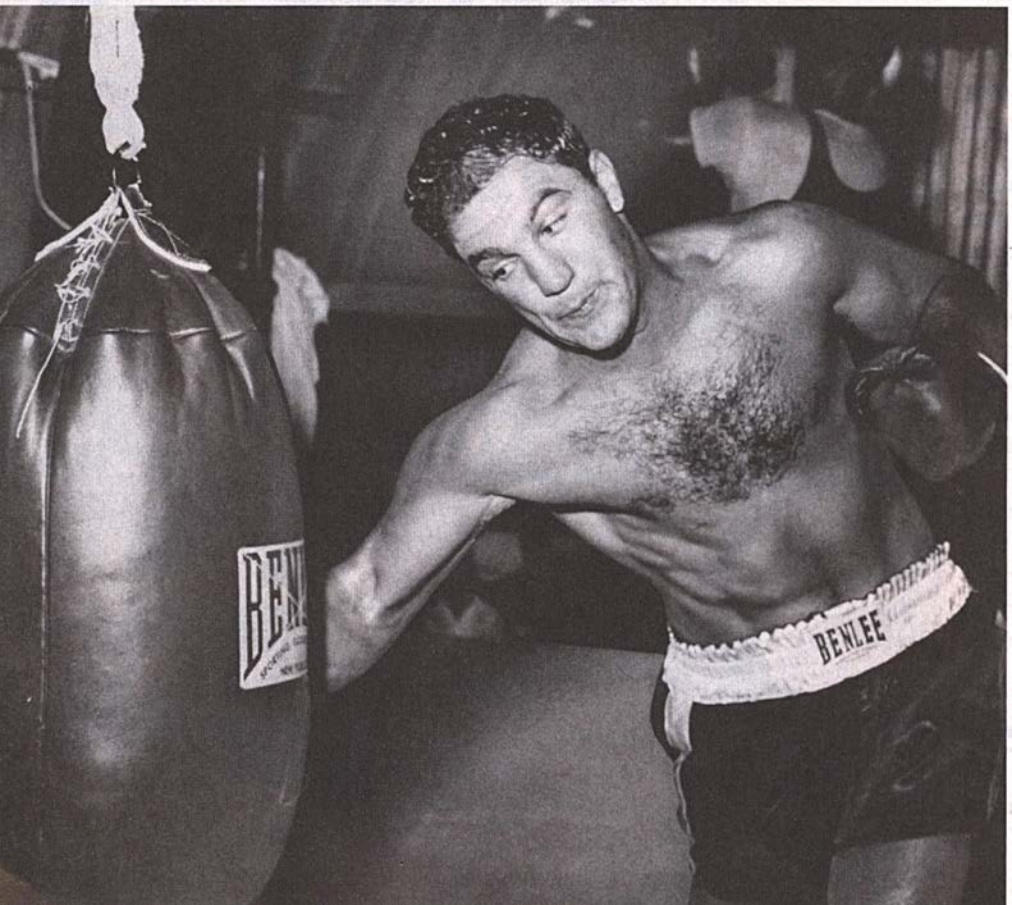
White momentarily stops the action and asks if they are OK. Dempsey snarls, "Yeah." Marciano nods, but he is still glassy-eyed with a look of confusion on his face.

"He was dropped with a left hook reminiscent of the one Walcott got him with in the first round before Marciano warmed up," said Lampley.

Dempsey is all over him again, and the wallop of leather landing resounds throughout the arena. Marciano is dropped to his knees by the same combination to the body with a finishing hook to the side of his head as the bell rings, ending the first round.

White continues the count while chasing Goldman from entering the ring. Marciano makes it up onto one knee at eight and beats the count. He is sent to the corner by White, who scolds Goldman but does not disqualify him for trying to enter the ring. 10-7 DEMPSEY.

"I told everyone that



Marciano developed his pulverizing punch power on the heavy bag.

would listen that Dempsey would murder Marciano and any other heavyweight in history," Arcel, the legendary trainer, says to his fellow HBO commentary crew between rounds. "I saw them all: Louis, Foreman, Frazier, Johnson, Jeffries. Dempsey would destroy them one by one. This is no surprise to me."

Rocky, who had been down early before, tastes canvas.

ROUND 2

Dempsey is frightening as he storms out on the attack again. Only Marciano's powerful legs and conditioning enable him to come out of his corner. He doesn't retreat. Rocky takes the fight to Dempsey.

Marciano manages to get in close and slams Dempsey's body with one of the shots he practiced in training camp on his 300-pound bag. A right hand to the pit of the stomach has Dempsey's attention. Rocky moves in and nails Dempsey with the "Suzie Q" right on the left side of the jaw and follows it up with the same right uppercut that knocked Roland LaStarza out of the ring.

Dempsey's knees buckle for a moment before a Marciano follow-up uppercut deposits him onto the ring apron. No one helps him back into the ring like the Firpo fight. But he climbs through the ropes by the count of eight. His gloves are wiped off, and White waves in Rocky.

Before Marciano can come any closer, Dempsey rushes him with blood in his eyes and an unstoppable fury.

Every moment he had to ride the rails, fight for pennies and fight every killer in mining camps, saloons and in the ring powers him forward. Dempsey launches a right hand and two left hooks. The second hook lands on Marciano's temple. A follow-up right crashes his jaw and sends him face-forward to the canvas as Dempsey hits him with one more crushing right to the side of the head on the way down. The crowd screams for the fight to stop.

Dempsey walks emotionless to a neutral corner, leans back with his lower legs crossed and watches Marciano motionless on the canvas like a tiger searching for any movement in its prey.

Marciano gets up at White's count of nine and is badly staggering backward. White stops the fight.

Blood streams from a cut by Marciano's right eye. His face, nose and cheekbones are swollen and purple from the pounding.

Buffer takes the mic: "The time is two minutes and 37 seconds of the second round, the winner by a TKO and now the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, the Manassa Mauler, Jack Dempsey!"

The crowd is still stunned in disbelief, as are the commentators and every media member.

The HBO crew is on camera. Lampley turns to Merchant and tasks him to sum up what they just saw.

"I have seen Joe Frazier, known for his relentless punching and stamina, go through every contender. I sat ringside while he beat Muhammad Ali, knocking him down in the process. Then I saw Joe destroyed by the power of George Foreman. Marciano has met his own Foreman tonight.

"The legacy of Rocky Marciano is written in stone. No one trained harder than him, no one in boxing history has more courage, but boxing isn't just about conditioning and guts. It's a young man's game, and when you get taken over the line of what the human body can endure by a puncher like Dempsey, you get what we saw tonight."

Lampley: "Max Kellerman is with Dempsey in the ring now."

Kellerman: "Jack, what a performance; I'm still in shock seeing it."

Dempsey: "Thanks, Max. It is what my team and I trained to do, and I wish Rocky the best. I had to get him quick; he is not the kind of guy you want to let into the fight."

Marciano approaches Dempsey and puts his arm around him. Jack does the same.

Marciano: "I want to let my family and friends know I am 100 percent OK. Jack was the better man tonight. I hope he gives me a rematch."

Dempsey: "I promise, Rocky, and I hope we will always be pals."

BETTMANN

WORLD BEAT

Kazuto Ioka (left) imposes his exemplary technique on countryman Kosei Tanaka.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

The annual Japan Boxing Awards is a tradition dating back to 1949 when Yoshio Shirai, who would be the first Japanese fighter to win a world title (flyweight) in 1952, earned the inaugural Fighter of the Year award.

The Japan Boxing Commission along with the Japan Professional Boxing Association and Boxing Writers Club announced the 2020 selection, which includes awards that honor technique and spirit as well as the usual categories, on January 28.

The close (20-16) vote for 2020 Fighter of the Year award went to bantamweight champ Naoya Inoue, who defended his Ring Magazine, IBF and WBA titles with a seventh-round KO of Jason Moloney, but the close runner-up was Kazuto Ioka, Japan's only four-division titleholder, who stopped three-weight wonder Kosei Tanaka on New Year's Eve. Inoue has won this honor four times, including the last three years.

Here are the winners of the other categories:

TECHNIQUE AWARD

Ioka (26-2, 15 KOs) – The WBO 115-pound titleholder proved he is a master of boxing in scoring two knockdowns before forcing the referee to save Kosei Tanaka (15-1, 9 KOs), The Ring's No. 1-rated flyweight at the time, from further damage. Ioka's left hook settled matters at 1:35 in the eighth round of the New Year's Eve event.

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE AWARD

Junto Nakatani (21-0, 16 KOs) – The skilled southpaw won the vacant WBO flyweight title in November at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo, dominating the higher-rated Giemel Magramo to an eighth-round stoppage.

GOOD EFFORT AND FIGHTING SPIRIT AWARDS

Kenichi Horikawa (41-16-1, 14 KOs) – The veteran two-time Japanese 108-pound champ looked sharp (at the ripe age of 40) stopping Daiki Tomita (15-2, 5 KOs) in 10 rounds to win the vacant Oriental and Pacific Boxing Federation (OPBF) junior flyweight title in July. After 58 fights in a 20-year pro career, Horikawa is still going strong.

Ryoji Fukunaga (13-4, 13 KOs) – The dynamic southpaw stopped Kenta Nakagawa (19-4-1, 12 KOs) in the 10th round of a true slugfest

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC

Naoya Inoue secured Knockout of the Year honors at the expense of Australian Jason Moloney.

to unify the WBO Asian Pacific, OPBF and Japanese 115-pound titles in December. Fukunaga earned his nickname: "Little Pacquiao."

KO OF THE YEAR

Inoue KO 7 Moloney – The Monster made his October 31 Las Vegas debut a memorable one, dropping Moloney with a hook in Round 6 and finishing the respected Australian contender with a short right in Round 7.

"The KO is always the best way for me to win a fight," Inoue said in accepting his award. "The way that I knocked him out might be clear and simple to people watching the fight, but those were punches that I was working on in the gym. I was watching and timing Moloney during the fight, and I was happy it worked out."

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

Hironori Mishiro (10-0-1, 3 KOs) – The 26-year-old up-and-comer won a 10-round majority decision over former WBO 130-pound titleholder Masayuki Ito (26-3-1, 14 KOs) in December in Tokyo.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR (WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP)

Ioka TKO 8 Tanaka – The WBO junior bantamweight championship, presented by DANGAN AOKI Promotions, exceeded high expectations.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR (NON-WORLD TITLE)

Masayoshi Nakatani TKO 9 Felix Verdejo – We knew Nakatani (19-1, 13 KOs) was tough. He fought 12 rounds against Teofimo Lopez with an orbital bone fracture in July 2019. The same effort from the towering contender was too much for Felix Verdejo (27-2, 17 KOs), who was dropped twice in the ninth round before the fight was halted. Nakatani had to get up from two knockdowns himself to battle his way back into the fight, which was presented by Top Rank on December 12 in Las Vegas.

FEMALE FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Etsuko Tada (20-3-3, 7 KOs) – The WBO 105-pound titleholder (who has also held the WBA and IBF strawweight belts) was honored as the best female fighter for the second time in her long career (the first time was in 2009). The southpaw scored an impressive one-punch knockout of Ayaka Miyao (23-9-2, 6 KOs), a former WBA atomweight (102-pound) titleholder, with a compact left counter in the

ninth round of their rematch in December. She turns 40 in May, but this performance proves she is still in her prime.

FEMALE FIGHT OF THE YEAR

Etsuko Tada TKO 9 Ayaka Miyao – The showdown for the vacant WBO 105-pound title, presented by DANGAN AOKI Promotions, took place on December 3 in Tokyo.

HONORARY AWARDS

Honorary Awards were presented to Takahiro Ao, the former WBC featherweight and junior lightweight titleholder; and Akira Yaegashi, the former WBA strawweight, Ring/WBC flyweight and IBF junior flyweight titleholder – both of whom officially retired from the sport in 2020.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The year got off to a slow start for South African boxing. There seems to be no end to COVID-19 woes, with the country deep in the middle of a second wave of infections.

There have been a few promoters, most notably Golden Gloves Promotions, Jack Brice Promotions and TLB Promotions, who soldiered on with cards in front of empty seats, while others like Xaba Promotions and Rumble Africa Promotions had theirs pulled at the last moment when infections spiked in the Eastern Cape.

The lack of action has led to fighters taking whatever opportunities they could find on the road.

★★★★

Junior featherweight Thato Bonokoane went to Ekaterinburg, Russia, to take on Asror Vokhidov, another in a long line of former Eastern bloc amateur standouts. The South African was tough and durable, as he has always been, but in the end he was overmatched, getting stopped at 1:48 of the ninth round. The undefeated Vokhidov built his record to 9-0 (5 KOs), whereas Bonokoane dropped to 10-4-3 (7 KOs).

★★★★

Lightweight prospect Denis Mwale also went on the road, taking on Ibrahim Class Mgender in his backyard of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Mwale, who hails from Malawi but is based in Johannesburg, was undefeated going in. He was up against a more seasoned opponent, though, and he had never been beyond six rounds as a professional. It was always going to be a big ask, and under the circumstances, Mwale put up a very credible performance. But he still suffered his first defeat by unanimous scores of 116-113, 118-110 and 117-111.

Mwale got off to a good start, boxing behind his jab and landing a straight right to the body, but Mgender started to come alive in the second round, landing his hooks downstairs and a straight right to the head.

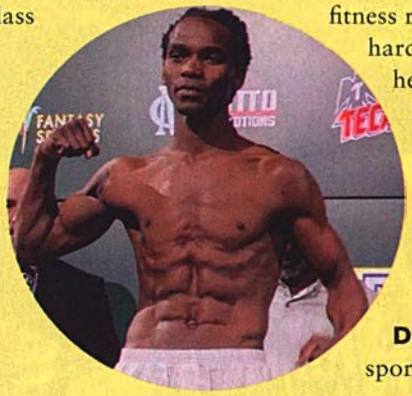
That same right proved to be the game-changer. Mwale landed his left hook in the third, but Mgender replied with a harder right and then hurt Mwale in the fourth with a left hook. Mwale was in trouble, but he was nothing if not resilient and managed to survive the round. He tried hard to turn things around in a terrific fifth, which saw heavy exchanges from both fighters, Mwale being better in close while Mgender owned the long game.

Mwale had a good Round 8, trying his best to drive Mgender to the ropes, but that was his last stand.

Mgender wobbled Mwale again with a left hook in the ninth round and then rocked him to his boots in the 11th round; Mwale just managed to ride out the storm behind his jab. Mgender tried to close the show in the last round, but Mwale was not going anywhere.

Mgender improved to 25-6 (11 KOs) while Mwale dropped to 8-1 (3 KOs).

Mwale showed the heart and fitness required for 12 hard rounds, and if he can work on his mistakes, he might still be one to watch in the future.



Experience was decisive for Ibrahim Class Mgender.

★★★★

Despite the sporadic action, there are some exciting silver linings for the near future.

For starters, junior flyweight Sivenathi "Special One" Nontshinga (9-0, 9 KOs) has been ordered by the IBF to fight a world title eliminator against Christian Araneta (19-1, 15 KOs) of the Philippines. No date is set at the time of writing, but his promoter, Rumble Africa, is in negotiations to bring the fight to South Africa.

Nontshinga, who has yet to be taken the distance, has done everything right so far and is one of South Africa's most exciting new faces, but he cannot afford to take Araneta for granted. The man from Cebu City has 15 knockouts on his ledger and will be coming to win.

Another South African who will hit the road is junior lightweight Khanyile Bulana (12-0, 8 KOs). He will challenge another unbeaten fighter, Italy's Michael Magnesi (18-0, 10 KOs), in Rome on April 17.

A high mountain to climb for the South African, but these are strange times.

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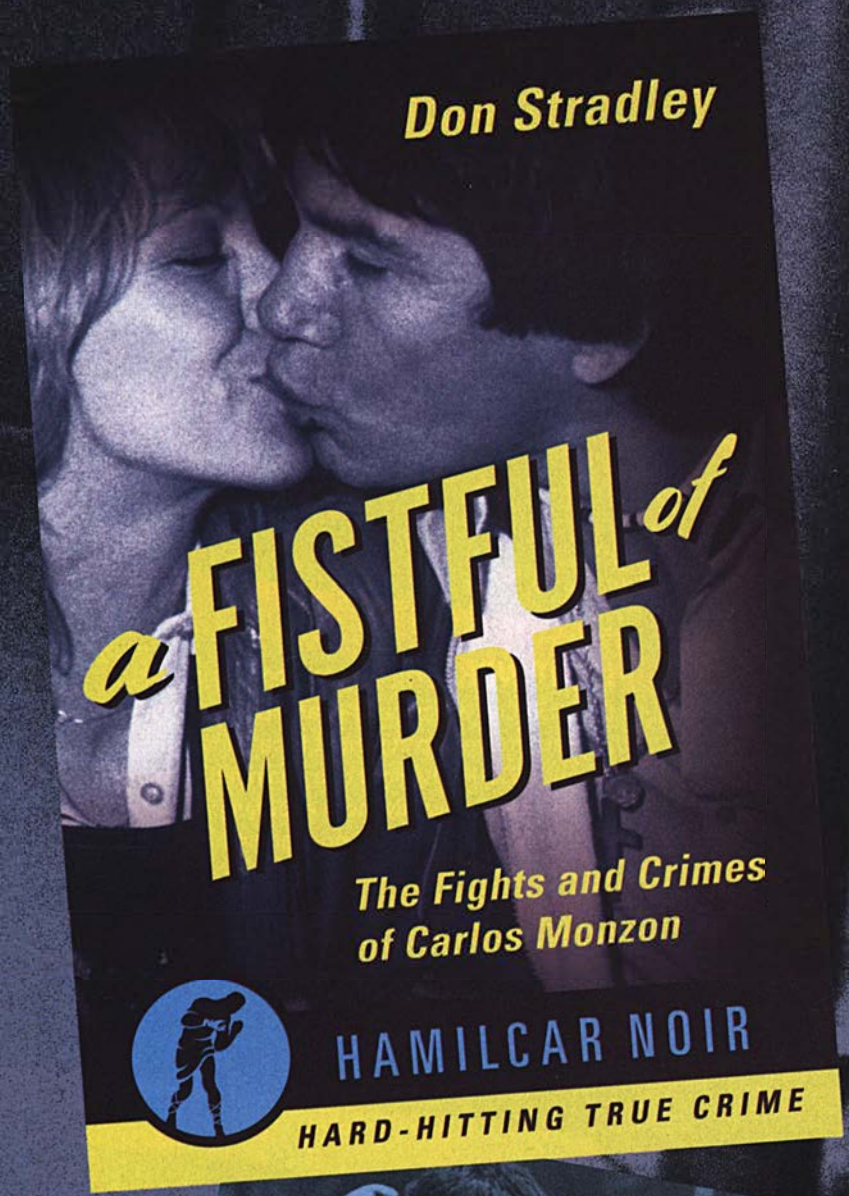

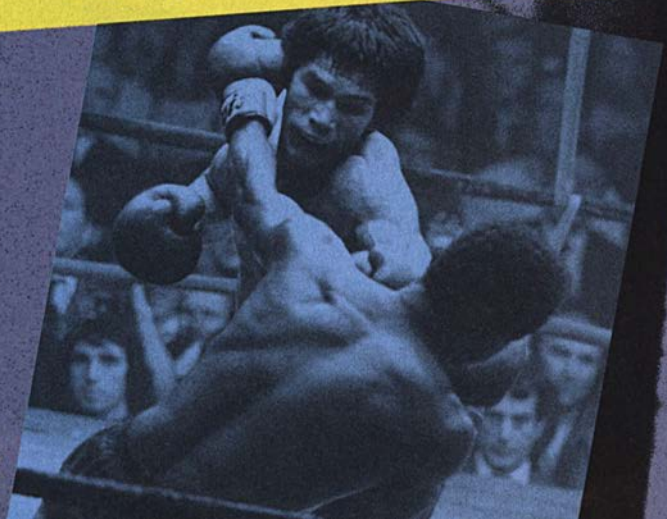

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—Jack Porter, *The Sportsman*

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LIGHT WORK: On July 29, 1994, at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, a 22-year-old Oscar De La Hoya moved up in weight for a shot at the vacant WBO lightweight title against the colorful, acrobatic – and vastly more experienced – Jorge Paez. It was a brutal and brief affair. Early in the second round, De La Hoya caught the former featherweight titleholder with a heavy left hook counter and elected to follow up immediately. Paez gamely tried to fight off the ropes but was caught with another rocket left hand that knocked him unconscious.

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COMING UP

Jessica McCaskill (left) will look to repeat her triumph over Cecilia Braekhus for the undisputed welterweight championship on March 13.

MARCH

MARCH 13 – Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Roman Gonzalez, junior bantamweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBC and Gonzalez's WBA titles), Dallas (DAZN). Also, Jessica McCaskill vs. Cecilia Braekhus, welterweights (for vacant Ring and McCaskill's IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles); Hiroto Kyoguchi vs. Axel Aragon Vega, junior flyweights (for Kyoguchi's Ring/WBA titles).

MARCH 13 – David Benavidez vs. Ronald Ellis, super middleweights, Uncasville, Connecticut (Showtime).

MARCH 20 – Vergil Ortiz vs. Maurice Hooker, welterweights, Fort Worth, Texas (DAZN).

MARCH 20 – Lawrence Okolie vs. Krzysztof Glowacki, cruiserweights (for vacant WBO title), U.K. location TBA at press time (DAZN).

MARCH 20 – Artur Beterbiev vs. Adam Deines, light heavyweights (for Beterbiev's IBF/WBC titles), Moscow (ESPN).

MARCH 25 – Amanda Serrano vs. Daniela Bermudez, featherweights (for Serrano's WBC/WBO titles), Puerto Rico (NBC Sports Net).

MARCH 27 – Alexander Povetkin vs. Dillian Whyte, heavyweights, Gibraltar (DAZN).

MARCH 31 – Tim Tszyu vs. Dennis Hogan, junior middleweights, Newcastle, Australia.

APRIL

APRIL 10 – Jaron Ennis vs. Sergey Lipinets, welterweights, Uncasville, Connecticut (Showtime).

APRIL 10 – Conor Benn vs. Samuel Vargas, welterweights, U.K. location TBA at press time (DAZN).

APRIL 24 – Emanuel Navarrete vs. Christopher Diaz, featherweights (for Navarrete's WBO title), Kissimmee, Florida (DAZN).

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